



LABOR DOBBS

Farrell Dobbs

# Recent Trends in the Labor Movement

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**COVER PHOTO:** Over 2,000 Kelsey-Hayes strikers booing and jeering United Automobile Workers President R. J. Thomas at a mass meeting in Detroit, October, 1945. Thomas was silenced by the angry workers when he issued a strikebreaking order for them to go back to work. Here he is shown pleading as the workers storm up to the platform.

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*Asher Haren*

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FARRELL DOBBS

## Price of Misleadership

# Unions Lose Ground

By Farrell Dobbs

AFL-CIO officials are trying to make much of a recent modest gain in membership. Their aim is to create an impression of vitality at the top of the unions, but that's pure hokum. Actually, the merged labor federation has not even managed to stand still under the present leadership; it has lost ground.

When the merger took place in 1955, the AFL had around 10 million members. The CIO — which had expelled several unions with thousands of members in an earlier internal witchhunt — came in about five million strong. Optimists forecasted that the merger alone would bring swift union growth, and in 1956 AFL-CIO membership did rise to 17.5 million. That proved to be the high-water mark.

A precipitate decline followed, and by 1963, the federation had no more than 12.5 million in its ranks. One reason for the decline was the expulsion of several unions, including the Teamsters, which had come under smear attack from the McClellan Committee of the U.S. Senate. Another cause was a general slump in recruitment, along with failure to carry through a projected organizing drive in the South.

### New Membership

During the last three years, AFL-CIO unions have made a slight comeback by recruiting about one million new members. A large part of the recruitment can be attributed to the increase in employment since 1963, especially in basic manufacturing. Another part has resulted from some unionization of government workers and increased organization of teachers. This recruitment has brought current AFL-CIO



**"NEVER WALKED A PICKET-LINE." George Meany made this boast shortly after merger of AFL-CIO.**

membership to some 13.5 million, still below the figure at the time of the 1955 merger.

Meanwhile, the total labor force has steadily grown. Since 1955, it has risen over eight million to a present record high of 78 million. That means there has been both a relative AFL-CIO decline, measured in proportion to the growing labor force, and a direct slump in absolute terms of federation membership. It is a sorry picture that can't be glossed over by boasting about low-scale union recruitment.

Unionization within the total labor force has traditionally centered among "blue collar" workers. In this category today, automation and general intensification of labor steadily chews up jobs, especially in mining, manufacture and transportation. Within the fast-growing "white collar" sector of the labor force, on the other hand, the

unions are notoriously weak. As of 1964, less than three million of 31 million workers in this category were organized, and the relative situation has improved little since then. Thus it is small wonder that the unions have become subject to atrophy.

Where the workers are organized, they remain gravely hampered by misleaders in the unions. The problem is graphically illustrated by the present fight to keep purchasing power abreast of soaring prices. In this struggle two basic facts, of opposite quality, have already emerged: there has been a steady rise of militancy in the union ranks; and leadership policy has been generally characterized by incompetence and timidity.

In battling the giant corporations, the workers find their ranks split by divisions into separate unions within a single industry. It is a needless problem artificially created by narrow-minded union bureaucrats. To patch over the difficulty temporarily, the labor officials have undertaken to set up bargaining coalitions among unions involved in contract negotiations with a given corporation. The situation being what it is, the action is useful — provided they are ready to make a fight. Instead, the bureaucrats have tended to fold quickly under strikebreaking pressure from Johnson, grab any face-saving concessions they can get and make a capitulatory settlement on corporation terms.

### Using Computers

The AFL-CIO has also begun to use computers for analysis of labor contracts, company profits and other items related to collective bargaining. This, too, can be a helpful device, again provided that the purpose is to reinforce a

correct union policy. Otherwise it is an exercise in futility, as was demonstrated in the November elections. Computers were used to help promote votes for capitalist "friends of labor." However, the union hacks were pushing a false political line and the computers proved worthless.

Although no capitalist politician can be said to represent labor's interests, it is worth noting that the union bureaucrats proved unusually ineffective in securing the election of candidates they backed. More important is the price paid by the union for the false bureaucratic policy. The workers' needs continue to be brushed aside in government, where stiffer anti-labor laws are being cooked up. Politically, organized labor remains what it has long been, a sterile appendage of the Democratic Party.

One section of the working class — the majority of Negroes, who are also workers — are doubly injured by bureaucratic misleadership in the unions. They are not getting the union support to which they are richly entitled in their general fight for economic, political and social equality. On top of that, they are discriminated against inside organized labor, especially within the craft unions.

### Support War

Another criminal policy of the union bureaucrats is their slavish support of the imperialist attack on the Vietnamese people. Acting counter to the interests of the union ranks, they have tarred organized labor with the image of a rubber stamp for Johnson's whole brutal line of imperialist aggression.

Looking at the union situation in its entirety, some analysts — who tend to dabble in supra-class "theory" — conclude that the working class has exhausted its role as a vital social force. Those who would so lightly dismiss the working class from political consideration are today getting a partial answer from the workers themselves. The upsurge of militancy during 1966 has given a dim preview of the latent social power of the working class. Current trends promise a further demonstration during 1967, and far more compelling evidence of labor's inherent power is bound to



**NEW YORK TRANSIT STRIKE.** Shutdown of New York city transit early this year in defiance of courts, and similar action later by airlines mechanics, were symbolic of new expressions of rank-and-file labor militancy.

come thereafter. The union problem is not one of working-class weakness; it stems from a crisis of leadership.

Consider the last convention of the AFL-CIO, held about a year ago. It was an insipid affair, ruled over by the top bureaucrats and preoccupied in large part with listening to various capitalist politicians. The delegates, ranging in age from middle to old, came from the secondary echelons of the general union bureaucracy. If a member of the rank and file was present, he was indeed an oddity. The existence of young workers in the union movement was only an unconfirmed rumor at the convention. This august assemblage dutifully returned to office the ruling Executive Council of the AFL-CIO, making only such minor changes in its composition as were decreed from on high.

In the stately environs of the Executive Council itself sits a self-perpetuating clique of aging bureaucrats, wedged fatly into their easy chairs and their faces turned firmly to the past. They show native cunning in dealing with the politics of internal union power, managing to move quickly enough when it comes to putting down rank-and-file "upstarts." They have a fairly clear idea what is being said at the White House and in Congress, even the state capitals and some city halls. When

it comes to the thinking of the union ranks, however, they have no clear lines of communication; nor do they have much interest, unless somebody is stirring up "trouble."

If the unions are to fulfill the purpose for which they were created in the first place the whole gang of corrupt bureaucrats must be cleaned out of office. Full internal democracy must be established in the unions, with all officials made firmly subject to continuous rank-and-file control. Union leaders must be found who have the ability to project a fighting program and the guts to carry it out. That can't be accomplished simply by changing the faces in union office. The new leadership must be forged around a program shaped along the following conceptual lines:

Put an end to labor "statesmanship" and advance demands that reflect the actual needs of the workers.

End all reliance on the capitalist government and use the full union power to defend the workers' rights and interests.

Abolish internal witchhunting in the unions and maintain a solid united front of the working class against the capitalist class.

Break entirely with capitalist politics and form an independent labor party based on the unions.

## The Fight For Union Democracy

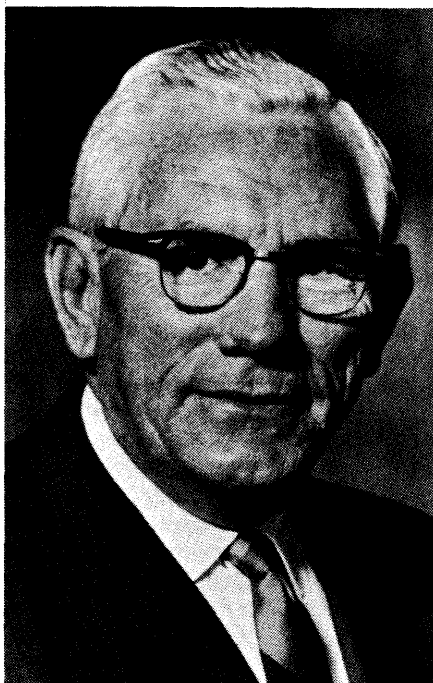
# Steel Union: Case History of Bureaucratism

Since I. W. Abel became president of the United Steelworkers, he has been publicized as a "quiet man" who gets things done through democratic mobilization of the union ranks. Nothing is said about his long identification with the dictatorial ruling machine in the union. Instead, Abel is depicted as a crusading leader who merits the workers' trust.

Members of the union can testify that he is nothing of the sort. His true image remains one of a bureaucrat floundering around in an effort to get off the hook of rank and file criticism. To probe into the union's present situation and Abel's role in it, a review of the background should prove helpful. It will also illustrate a broader problem: the general bureaucratic strangulation of internal democracy which, although varying in form and scope, exists throughout the union movement.

The present steel union had its origins in the Steel Workers Organizing Committee created in 1937 by the CIO. At the time such a provisional structure was tactically justified, since the CIO was just launching a unionization drive in steel, and it was also involved in a complex struggle with AFL craft unionists. It was another thing, however, for the CIO leaders to artificially perpetuate this loosely-defined setup, as they did for the next five years. Their object was to assure the entrenchment of a ruling bureaucracy before giving the union constitutional form.

SWOC was put under the command of Philip Murray, who was then a trusted aide of John L. Lewis, founding leader of the CIO. From the outset Murray ran things in dictatorial fashion, acting along class-collaborationist policy lines. Contract demands were shaped, not to meet the workers' basic needs, but according to what the



**I. W. Abel**

corporations might give without a serious struggle. If there had to be a strike, the line was to end it as quickly as possible, forcing acceptance of whatever face-saving settlement the employers granted. The union was tied firmly to the Democratic Party and a policy of reliance on the capitalist government substituted for use of the workers' power.

### **Rule Widens**

As the union gained substance the Murray bureaucracy raided the treasury for handsome salaries and lavish expense accounts. In an environment poles apart from the grind in the plants, the bureaucrats developed a calm, dispassionate view of the workers' problems. They gave "statesman-like" attention to the corporation's side in disputes and acted more and more as policemen against the workers. Membership rights were subordinated to bureaucratic special interests. Entire locals were subjected to disciplinary action.

At conventions of the organization the delegates faced a bureaucratic steamroller.

It was not until 1942, after consolidation of dictatorial rule over the union, that Murray yielded to membership demands to hold a constitutional convention. SWOC was displaced by a formal international union (with Canadian affiliates) — the present United Steelworkers. Murray was made president with vast constitutional powers. David J. McDonald, who got his start in the union as a stenographer for Murray, became secretary-treasurer. As the delegates were quickly to learn, formal adoption of a union constitution neither strengthened membership rights nor weakened bureaucratic rule.

### **Murray's Threat**

Murray warned the 1942 convention: "I shall fight any attempt that is made to have little backroom caucuses while this convention is going on." He was serving notice that he would try to eliminate any group that exercised its democratic right to organize support for a program challenging the line of his machine. The threat was aimed at loyal union members who — denied free speech at the convention itself — were openly voicing discontent with Murray's policies in hotel lobbies.

Threats of the kind were backed up consistently by physical attacks on dissidents within the union. Such assaults were usually made on the sly, but one was later carried out publicly at the union's 1948 convention. Nick Migas, a delegate from Indiana, circulated leaflets attacking the signing of no-strike contracts with steel corporations and other bureaucratic policies. Murray had the leaflet read to the convention and then proceeded to whip the delegates into a frenzy against Migas. (As

a reporter for *The Militant*, I was an eyewitness to the outrage that followed. — F.D.)

Murray took immediate advantage of the charged atmosphere he had created, using it to jam through convention approval of his wage policy. Meanwhile, Migas tried to slip quietly out of the hall, but he didn't make it. A pack of goons followed him out onto the street where he was caught and severely beaten.

When Murray died in 1952 a power struggle developed within the bureaucracy. The union constitution provided that the vice president, James Thimmes, should complete Murray's term in office. Thimmes was shoved aside by McDonald, who used his superior strength within the bureaucracy to have the international executive board install him as president. This direct violation of the constitution was later given a pseudo-democratic cover through an election referendum.

McDonald carried to new extremes Murray's line of peaceful coexistence with the labor-exploiting corporations. Hard-won union gains were gradually given away. In 1959 the cost-of-living clause previously established in steel contracts was gutted, and wages remained relatively static until 1965. An almost universal breakdown of grievance procedures developed.

Under Murray a wage policy committee had been set up, comprised mainly of people on his staff and local union officials subservient to the top bureaucracy. This body, devised to circumvent membership control over negotiations with the corporations, was empowered to make decisions on contract settlements and regulate any strike action. In 1952 membership rights were further abridged by making the national officers the sole signatories of collective bargaining agreements. To give local officials a bigger stake in internal union stability and make them beholden to the top bureaucrats, pressures were put to further extend their tenure in office, from an original one-year and then two-year period, to a present term of three years.

### Protest Grows

Opposition to McDonald first developed through a dues protest

movement and then in the running of rank-and-file slates for election to top union offices. As membership dissatisfaction continued to mount other bureaucrats became worried. They finally decided to pull a palace revolt before all of them faced a rank-and-file uprising. With the backing of a section of the bureaucracy, Abel ran against McDonald in the February 1965 referendum to elect national officers. His main plank was a promise to restore membership control over basic union policy. In a close vote Abel was declared elected to the union presidency.

Upon assuming office he faced a big test in the re-negotiation of contracts in steel which were about to expire. As usual Johnson stepped in to help the corporations, bringing pressure against a strike by shedding crocodile tears about the need for steel to "back up our boys in Vietnam." Abel who supports Johnson politically, folded under the pressure. He settled for small wage increases, less than those being negotiated in other industries at the time. It was a raw deal for the steel workers whose wages had been virtually frozen for the previous six years. Local plant issues, mainly disputes over working conditions, were left unresolved. This miserable contract was rammed down the steel workers' throats in typical bureaucratic fashion.

### Rising Dissatisfaction

Since then unrest has mounted among steel workers and is becoming widespread. Dissatisfaction has also grown elsewhere in the union. In earlier days the organization was composed mainly of steel workers, but today the situation is reversed with a majority of the members in industries other than steel. Workers in the latter category, disliking the overlordship of the steel-based wage policy committee, gradually began to force the creation of special councils in their industries to intervene in contract negotiations. They also raised increasingly strong protests against interference in their affairs by the bureaucratic hacks in steel.

These were the internal conditions under which Abel faced a union convention last September. In an effort to appease the mem-

bership he played the "democrat," put through some petty reforms and made will-o-the-wisp promises.

To give credit where it is due, Abel packed the convention with only half the usual number of goons and nobody was physically assaulted. Delegates were given relative freedom to voice their criticisms, but there was a catch to it. Debate was allowed only on resolutions cleared for convention action by a bureaucrat-dominated resolutions committee. A decision made to expedite grievance handling to avoid "wildcat" strikes, with stress put on distinguishing between "good" and "bad" grievances. Proposals from the floor to eliminate the no-strike clause in union contracts were overruled.

Legalizing an already largely accomplished fact, the convention authorized separate conference structures for the basic steel, aluminum, nonferrous and manufacturing industries. At the same time the wage policy committee was stripped of its power to ratify contracts, authorize strikes and call them off. The industry conferences, also rigged for bureaucratic control, will have authority to recommend strikes and approve contract settlements. Hazily-defined provisions are made for some form of consulta-



David McDonald

tive vote by the membership. As usual the international executive board retains full supervisory control over contract demands, negotiations with the corporations and strike policy.



On balance the convention was largely a bust for the membership. Delegates were allowed to let off steam and nobody was roughed-up for it, but the bureaucrats remained firmly in the saddle. The policies adopted by the convention were those of the Abel regime and none other.

#### **Abel's Requests**

A few weeks after the convention Abel addressed a meeting of the Economic Club of New York City. There he called for a "summit conference of Congressional leaders, top industrialists, representatives of organized labor and other influential Americans." Such a gathering, he said, "...might consider adopting a program for a Great Society through which we could actually obtain . . . an equal sharing in our prosperity. It might establish a fresh list of national priorities . . . (with) the same kind of unhesitating commitment that we give to appropriations for national defense, space exploration and the building of supersonic planes." The audience of bankers and businessmen greeted his remarks with restrained applause.

The same night Roger M. Blough, chairman of United States Steel, spoke at New York University. He deplored what he termed "the fact that when Presidential authority is successfully defied, as it has been so consistently on the wage side . . . (it) can hardly fail to have an effect upon the moral fiber of the nation and to undermine respect for government generally." The double-talking

Blough, whose profiteering outfit recently decreed a whopping price increase on steel produce, seemed little moved by Abel's "statesmanship." He was serving notice that, when the next round of union contract negotiations comes up in 1968, he will oppose "excessive" wage increases and he will count on Johnson to back him up.

Once the whole picture is brought to light, the record shows that the "quiet man" has not at all been capable of getting things done in a meaningful way. Like his predecessors in office, he has no stomach for a standup fight with the corporations. He has kept the union in the rut where Murray and McDonald put it, and there is no real prospect of things getting better under his regime.

Abel's tactics show that democracy has to mean more than the right to talk; it must also mean the right of workers to act in defense of their class interests. Achievement of full union democracy requires a fight to overturn bureaucratic rule and establish rank-and-file control. The program for that fight should include points of the following nature:

No restrictions on the right to strike. Abolish all no-strike pledges and all no-strike clauses in union contracts. Restore the full power of the local unions to take strike action through a democratic decision of the membership.

Full voice for the membership in determining contract demands. Rank-and-file control over negotiations with employers. No collective bargaining agreements to

be signed until ratified by the workers involved.

#### **Membership Control**

Membership control over the handling of grievances, and freedom of action to enforce union conditions on the job.

No discrimination because of age, sex, race, national origin or political beliefs. Abolish all contract provisions and all clauses in union constitutions and by-laws that are discriminatory in any of these respects.

No impairment of the autonomous rights of local unions. Regular membership meetings of local unions at reasonably frequent intervals. Rank-and-file review and final decision in all proceedings involving disciplinary action against a union member.

Annual union conventions with all delegates to be democratically elected by the membership and all convention committees democratically elected by the delegates.

Yearly elections on a democratic basis of union functionaries in all categories from grievancemen to top officials. All functionaries to be subject to recall if they default on their duties at any time during their term of office.

No union functionary to receive a salary higher than the top wage scale in the given industry. Expense accounts to be limited to reasonable needs for legitimate union activities. Full financial reports to the membership at regular intervals.

Freedom of expression for all views in opposition to the politics of incumbent union officials, including access to the union press.

## PALACE REVOLT IN AFL-CIO

# Meany vs. Reuther — Basic Issues Reflected

The general run of hucksters who pose as “news analysts” in the capitalist press have one thing in common: They tend to reduce issues to the small change of personal conflict. They are well paid for the diversion from honest discussion of serious matters, because outlived capitalism can't afford frank talk. Too many people would become aware of the need for a basic social change.

A deceptive appearance is given of treating things seriously without actually doing so. In the process a plug is gotten in for a basic norm of the capitalist rat race. People are taught that only one thing counts in all situations: What's in it for Number One?

With this approach the hucksters quickly get to the nub of the dispute between Walter Reuther and George Meany in the top bureaucracy of the AFL-CIO. When the two labor federations merged in 1955 Meany headed the AFL and Reuther, the CIO. Meany got the top spot in the merger, while Reuther had to play second fiddle. So — Reuther wants Meany's job.

Only Reuther and Meany themselves can be fully aware of their personal aspirations in the current dispute and, for others, such aims are of no importance. It is the larger aspects of developments within the AFL-CIO that count. Clues to really important matters in the dispute can be found by probing into various key questions: for example, the present situation and needs of the AFL-CIO membership; Meany's policy and what Reuther has to offer in its place. Before examining these questions in particular, a few generalizations seem in order.

### **Bureaucratic Fears**

The overall picture indicates that a palace revolt is developing within the AFL-CIO bureaucracy,



**WOUNDED SOLDIER.** Working class sons are bearing brunt of sacrifice in Vietnam. Impact of Vietnam war on workers brings death and mutilation of working class youth on the battlefield. It brings inflation, and government and company policies directed against unions at home.

one similar to the Abel-McDonald dispute in the steel union (see Jan. 2 *Militant*). As was the case with McDonald, Meany's policies have gotten dangerously out of gear with the needs of the union membership. Among other bureaucrats, such as Reuther, a feeling is growing that something must be done about it or the whole bureaucracy will face a rank-and-file uprising. When examined from this viewpoint, Reuther's present line — although failing

to meet the workers' needs — reflects at least a distorted image of significant new labor trends.

Working people are showing increased concern and resentment over losses in buying power because of war-inflated prices. They are worried about the growing gap between earnings and take-home pay due to tax gouging, imposed mainly to finance an unpopular war. As a result they tend to brush aside Johnson's “guideposts” and press demands for

"catch-up" pay increases. There is also growing pressure for an escalator clause in union contracts to keep wages abreast of rising living costs.

Other key issues impelling workers toward struggle are speed-up and bad working conditions; and in some industries they are rapidly being automated out of jobs. Grievances arising over these general issues continue to mount, clogging the present defective apparatus for handling them. Under the impact of these frustrations workers have shown growing militancy across the last year and the trend is spreading throughout the class.

At the same time the capitalist government, to meet its war needs, is preparing to strike new blows at the workers, instead of making concessions to them. Johnson's use of Taft-Hartley injunctions against strikers is on the rise and the Vietnam war is used as a pretext. Stiffer federal laws against labor are in preparation, both new curbs on the right to strike and further government intervention into union affairs along the lines of the Kennedy-Landrum-Griffin Law.

### **Rising Militancy**

Relying on Washington to back them up, employers are stiffening their resistance to union demands. Secretary of Labor Wirtz predicts that 1967 will be "a hard bargaining year," with "a lot of argument" over cost-of-living escalators. Monopoly corporations are spending millions for anti-union propaganda and use of strike-breakers is on the increase. Even union bureaucrats have to bestir themselves in the face of such threats, and in Reuther's case he must keep in mind this year's contract negotiations in auto. Another prod is the mounting tendency among workers to engage in what might be called guerrilla warfare against the capitalists, the government — and the union bureaucrats.

In a number of cases lately the rank and file rejected contract settlements recommended by union bureaucrats, telling them to go back and get more from the company. Opposition is growing to the policy of tying the workers' hands with long-term contracts. Also new is the degree to

which bureaucrats have had to tolerate — and sometimes authorize — local strikes. Demands are being pressed for a membership vote in determining contract settlements and in deciding if grievances have been adequately handled. All told, the bureaucrats are experiencing a decline in leadership authority and some among them feel a need to do something about it. They think a little self-reform can do the trick, but the situation is too far gone for that.

Under bureaucratic rule the unions have become wedded to the status quo on the basis of rotten compromises with the capitalist class. Internally the unions have been damaged by witchhunting carried out in the service of the capitalist government. Attempts to organize new layers of workers, few though they have been, have resulted in far more failures than successes. As Reuther admits, "Today, the AFL-CIO represents a smaller proportion of the American labor force than at the time of the merger in December, 1955."

There has been drastic loss of workers' control on the job, which was once powerfully maintained by the militant unions of the 1930s. Organized labor now wields far less economic power than it did in the 1945-46 strike wave. On the great social issues of the day the union movement appears more or less as a lackey of capitalism, instead of meeting its historic role as a crusader for social betterment.

### **Actual Disagreement**

Although Reuther has no answer to the problem, he does inadvertently expose the bureaucratic tumor lodged in what is alleged to be the brain center of the labor movement. This is especially so in his letter to locals of the United Auto Workers, issued Dec. 29 on behalf of the executive board. Meany emerges in the letter as a dictator who, in disregard of industrial union views within the AFL-CIO Executive Council, has centralized all policy direction in his hands on the basis of old-line craft union conceptions. As against this, Reuther calls for sharing of leadership responsibility through ". . . creative, frank and meaningful democratic discussion within the

highest councils of the AFL-CIO."

Nothing is said by Reuther about involving the AFL-CIO ranks in "meaningful democratic discussion" of problems so vital to them. It is plain to see that he shares with Meany a desire to keep any discussion bottled up in the Executive Council. A question therefore arises. What program does Reuther have to offer in "democratic" discussion among the bureaucratic elite, and how will it square with the needs of the working class?

### **Vietnam Issue**

The most vital question facing the working class is the Vietnam war. It is being fought for the sole benefit of profiteering capitalists in this country, who intend to make the workers pay the bill. That is why anyone who supports the war has to wind up with a false line on all other matters affecting the working class. Trade unionists who are becoming aware of this fact also begin to perceive that a grave problem of leadership is involved.

This was evidenced at a recent Chicago conference of unionists opposed to the war. After several speakers had stressed Johnson's duplicity on the Vietnam issue, a unionist said: "We know about the problem of Johnson. Now tell us what to do about the problem of Meany." This dissatisfied unionist was referring to Meany's swift and unqualified approval of every vicious step Johnson takes in escalating the imperialist assault on the Vietnamese people. What then can be expected from Reuther, who terms Meany "narrow and negative" on foreign policy?

In the Dec. 29 letter Reuther says, "There is no basic difference between the UAW and the AFL-CIO in the commitments to resist Communist aggression . . ." This statement identifies Reuther with Meany in upholding the lying propaganda gimmick used by U.S. imperialism to justify its criminal acts.

Wherever oppressed peoples abroad strive to control their own affairs, Washington labels the struggle "Communist aggression" and intervenes militarily against them. That means Reuther's "criticism" of the imperialist mobsters reduces itself to a question of the tactics they use. He winds up allied with capitalist "doves"

who hope to defeat the Vietnamese by forcing them to "negotiate" under brutal military pressure. Thus, his advocacy of a "negotiated settlement" violates the Vietnamese right of self-determination; and it has the effect of putting imperialist war needs ahead of the American workers' interests.

AFL-CIO members take a different view in one important respect. Despite the Vietnam war, they are pressing for strike action to keep wages abreast of runaway prices. In the sharpening class struggle that results, Meany has reacted by advocating a no-strike pledge at "war-essential" plants and "voluntary dispute-settling machinery" — in short, unconditional surrender to the warlords. On this count "statesman" Reuther calls for "... a comprehensive economic and collective bargaining program to achieve equity for American wage earners on a basis consistent with the total needs of the economy . . ."

#### **Leaves Room for LBJ**

Capitalists are notorious for putting their profits foremost among "the total needs of the economy." So readers of the UAW letter are left wondering how much "equity" workers would get under Reuther's policy, and how they would go about fighting for it. A clue is offered in a subsequent passage of the letter. It advocates a "... program to enable workers in critical and vital public service industries to achieve equity comparable with other workers under circumstances in which workers in these industries will not be forced to resort to strike action that endangers the health and safety of the public."

But any strike that can be connected with Vietnam, no matter how remotely, is held by Johnson to "endanger the health and

safety of the public." That means Reuther invites Johnson's Taft-Hartley injunctions. Like Meany, he violates a basic labor principle that calls for unconditional defense of the right of all workers to strike in support of their class interests.

Concerning the freedom struggle of black people, the letter calls for "... equal rights and equal opportunity not only at the community level and through legislation but within the labor movement itself." When it comes to the deed, however, Reuther shares with Meany responsibility for the crime of denouncing advocates of black power; which is to say, he lines up against the militant wing of the black freedom fighters. Like other union bureaucrats, he has failed to act forthrightly in combating attempts to stir up racial antagonisms within the working class. Because of such false policies all workers, black and white, suffer injury to their basic class interests.

#### **Demagogic Stand**

Like a Democrat running for office, Reuther seeks to divert political attention from basic class issues by stressing reform aims that lend themselves to tokenism and gradualism. He does so through demagogic stress on important social needs such as improved education, social security and health care; also on problems like urban renewal, air and water pollution, etc. This, in turn, gives him a bridge toward collaboration with liberal capitalist politicians, a subject he has failed to mention in criticizing Meany's policies.

The fact is that Reuther has no important differences with Meany on the question of keeping labor enslaved in capitalist politics. At the 1966 UAW convention he denounced any attempt to break

away from the Democratic Party, asserting that he was "... not going to flirt with that kind of reckless, dangerous idea of forming labor's own political party." He said, "Labor must seek a basic realignment of the two major political parties, which would get all the reactionaries in the Republican Party where they belong and make the Democratic Party a truly liberal people's party." This "realignment" fantasy is simply a demagogic device to keep labor tied to a party run by a gang of strikebreakers, racists and warlords.

On every major count Reuther's policies show that AFL-CIO members would have nothing going for them in any "democratic" debate he might have with Meany inside the Executive Council. What the workers need is a genuine left wing in the unions, based upon rank-and-file militants. To be effective the left wing should be constructed around a program of concrete demands. These should include:

Full and unfettered membership discussion of all problems confronting the workers, and rank-and-file control over all union affairs.

A cost-of-living escalator in union contracts to offset rising prices.

A reduced work week with no cut in pay. Unemployment compensation at union wages for all jobless persons 18 or over, whether or not they have been previously employed.

Equal rights in the unions and on the job for black workers and for members of other minorities. Full union support to the civil rights struggle as a whole.

Bring the troops home now. Use the money spent for war to meet social needs here at home.

Build an independent labor party based on the unions.

# Assault on Labor Reaches New Stage

Current news reports stress an impending clash between "a more conservative Congress and more aggressive union demands . . . and growing business clamor for a new law to prevent strikes." At the same time evidence mounts that Johnson is moving to satisfy the desires of big business and, as usual, the liberals are running interference for him. Plainly a new chapter is opening in the long story of anti-labor legislation.

Government assaults on labor's rights are as old as the history of world capitalism. In this country the attacks have grown in intensity since the Civil War, especially at junctures when objective conditions have impelled workers into struggle in defense of their class interests. The subject merits extensive research by students of labor history; but for purposes of this article a review will be limited to features of the last 30-odd years.

As the nation entered the 1930s social unrest was mounting under pressures of deep economic depression. Working people desperately wanted action to meet their needs, but only a relative handful belonged to unions. These few were mainly skilled tradesmen organized into craft unions within the American Federation of Labor. Production workers in basic industry, and the growing mass of unemployed, remained generally unorganized; and they were to find the AFL more a hindrance than a help to them.

Samuel Gompers had founded the AFL on concepts of "business unionism," putting emphasis on "sanctity" of contracts and strict control of strikes. Capitalist political rule went unchallenged, with the unions confined to rewarding "friends" and "punishing" enemies by horsetrading the labor vote. One craft often scabbed on another. AFL unions tended to unite

only in defense of common craft interests, focusing on their narrow concerns without regard to the needs of other workers.

## Battles of 1930s

As the crisis of the 1930s grew worse the unemployed began to organize on their own, with help from radicals, and pressed for government action to ease their plight. Employed workers sought to organize as best they could through the AFL, doing so in a general mood to strike in support of their class demands.

In the battles that ensued the capitalists hit back with labor spies, company cops, injunctions, regular police, special deputies, troops, jailings, beatings and killing of pickets. While facing this capitalist assault, strikers often got a stab in the back from AFL bureaucrats. By the mid-1930s the AFL default had set the stage for the Committee for (later, Congress of) Industrial Organization to explode onto the scene as the union of mass production workers in basic industry.

With a sure class instinct the CIO ranks went for the jugular vein of the industrial overlords. In massive sit-down strikes they occupied the plants, defying capitalist dictates about the "sacred rights" of private property. Once a contract was won, they continued to exercise workers' control in changed form. When a company violated the contract, union stewards halted the assembly line until grievances were settled to the workers' satisfaction.

The capitalists reacted by having local and state courts declare the sit-downs "illegal." State laws were passed against "trespass" on company property during strikes. In 1940 a U.S. Supreme Court decision set the legal stage for injunctions against sit-down strikes. With the CIO by then under bu-

reaucratic internal control, use of the sit-down tactic had already ebbed; but it was to reappear in the 1960s in the form of sit-ins by black freedom fighters.

Parallel with the CIO upsurge, Franklin D. Roosevelt moved to lay a basis for presidential strike-breaking. He issued an arbitrary dictum that "You can't strike against the government." A federal law followed making it a crime to do so, and that led to a rash of state and local laws of the kind. The dictum was aimed not only at public workers; it was also preparatory to strikebreaking government "seizures" of private industry.

Roosevelt, whom mythology pictures as "the best friend labor ever had," openly bared his fangs against the workers in the 1937 steel strike. On Memorial Day of that year a peaceful parade of strikers outside a steel plant was fired upon by Chicago police. Ten workers were killed and another 40 shot in the back. The CIO leaders asked Roosevelt's help against the steel corporations' uniformed killers. Labor's Democratic "champion" replied, "A plague on both your houses." This condemnation, aimed with seeming impartiality at both the murderers and the murdered, could only put him on the murderers' side.

In June 1941 Roosevelt proved definitively where he stood by sending U.S. troops in peacetime to smash union picket lines at the North American Aviation plant in California. He did so through government "seizure" of the plant in the name of a trumped-up "national emergency." Actually he was preparing to plunge the nation into World War II and his plans included suppression of the right to strike.

Two years later "friend" Roosevelt engineered passage of the wartime Smith-Connally Act, mak-



ing it a "crime" to strike or slow down production at facilities in "possession" of the government. Resorting to strikebreaking "seizures" of private industry under this law, he blocked a railroad walkout. Government "possession" of rail lines was shown by putting company executives in colonels' uniforms, and operational profits were left in the "colonels'" tills.

That same year (1943) the United Mine Workers fought a running battle against a strikebreaking "seizure" of the coal mines. Since Roosevelt couldn't jail 320,000 miners, he was forced in the end to permit a strike settlement on terms that broke through the wage freeze he had imposed on all workers. The miners' heroic battle stirred workers generally toward an upsurge of struggle that culminated in the powerful 1945-46 strike wave.

It should be noted in passing that the Communist Party denounced the 1943 mine strikes as "treasonable." Since 1937 the CP had been on record against "un-

authorized" strikes; that is, membership action without permission from the union bureaucrats. Later it was to advocate that the wartime no-strike pledge made by union bureaucrats be continued "indefinitely" after hostilities ended. As has been the case from the 1930s up to the present, the CP also backed the bureaucratic class collaborationists in keeping labor tied to the Democratic Party.

When Roosevelt died in 1945 the union bureaucrats and CP hacks lined up in support of Harry S. Truman, who had assumed the Presidency. Soon after World War II ended, this Democratic "friend" invoked wartime powers to break an oil refinery strike. A few months later he commandeered the railroads to block a walkout, asking Congress to authorize the drafting of strikers into the army.

#### Fines Miners

In mid-1946 Truman signed the anti-labor Hobbs bill into law. It provided for jailing of strikers

convicted of "racketeering" which "obstructs, delays or affects" interstate commerce. Toward the end of the year he conspired with a federal judge to impose a \$3.5 million fine on the United Mine Workers for "contempt" of a strikebreaking injunction.

In 1947 Democrats and Republicans ganged up to pass the Taft-Hartley Act with the central aim of empowering the President to invoke injunctions against strikes. Among other features of the Act, Section 14(b) opened the way for anti-union "Right to Work" laws in the states. By this means capitalism began to whittle away at the massive labor power shown in the 1945-46 union upsurge.

Truman quickly began freehanded use of his newfound authority under the Taft-Hartley Act, but in some cases he still felt too restricted. So he moved to secure added powers through the 1948 Selective Service Act to "seize and operate" struck industries. Then, in 1949, he issued a declaration claiming "inherent"

power" as President to invoke court injunctions to break any strike he chose to attack.

During the Korean war "friend" Truman put railroad workers under command of company executives dubbed "army officers" in an attack on a switchmen's strike. He also "took possession" of steel plants to prevent a walkout.

After Dwight D. Eisenhower, a Republican, took over the Presidency, the bipartisan assault on labor continued in the extreme witchhunting atmosphere of McCarthyism. In 1954 Democrat Hubert H. Humphrey teamed up with Republican John M. Butler to push through an ultrareactionary law. It undertook, for the first time in U.S. history, to outlaw a political party — the Communist Party — and it denied legal recognition to any union suspected of being "subversive."

Then, in 1959, the Kennedy-Landrum-Griffin law was put through. Its purpose was to authorize government intervention in internal union affairs and to stymie labor's use of secondary boycotts as an economic weapon. A year later John F. Kennedy, who had helped to master-mind that law, was elected President. Under his Democratic administration the first compulsory arbitration law in U.S. history was enacted to prevent a 1963 railroad strike.

Lyndon B. Johnson had scarcely gotten settled into the White House, after Kennedy's assassination, when he invoked a Taft-Hartley injunction against a waterfront walkout.

Last summer Johnson connived with Congress to rig a special law intended to force striking airline mechanics back to work for 180 days on company terms. The bill had passed in the Senate and was on its way to the House floor when the dispute was settled. Lately Johnson has repeatedly threatened and — with increasing frequency — invoked strikebreaking injunctions, using the Vietnam war as a

pretext for backing capitalists against workers.

While Democratic candidates were posing as "friends of labor" in the elections last fall, the head of the party, Johnson, sneakily set up a task force to prepare the way for stiffer anti-labor laws. His aims were forecasted in an obscure passage of a pompous speech made last July at Indianapolis. In it he warned labor — along with black freedom fighters and anti-war students — to "keep the peace" and to "abide by the decisions of government." Tips leaked to the press since then from "informed sources" give a somewhat clearer indication of what he is cooking up.

Evidently Johnson is responding to complaints from the monopoly capitalist rulers of the country, who are dissatisfied with the Railway Labor Act and the Taft-Hartley Act. Their beef appears to be that these laws only postpone strikes and fail to provide a means for definitively crushing labor struggles. They are pressing their lackeys in public office to do something about it; and they show a sense of urgency arising from anticipated growth of the militancy now being demonstrated by the union rank and file.

Although ready to obey their masters' commands, capitalist politicians have the problem of continuing to pose as "friends of labor" while double-crossing the workers. So they engage in pettifogging discussion of a "series of alternatives" to deal with strikes "causing national emergencies." They also maneuver to dodge, or at least to spread around, responsibility for the foul deeds they intend to commit. No matter how they may proceed in detail, one thing is already certain: The capitalist politicians are preparing a new and more severe assault on labor's rights.

#### **Union Bureaucrats**

As though that were not danger enough for the workers, they must

also face leadership treachery within the unions. At every juncture in the capitalist attack the union bureaucrats have offered no more than token resistance; their actual policy has been to beg for a "compromise" entailing "milder restrictions" than the capitalists planned. At the same time they strive to prove their value as "stabilizers" of class relations on capitalist terms.

George Meany has proposed a voluntary no-strike pledge at "war-essential" plants and what would amount to compulsory arbitration of labor-capital disputes. Walter Reuther, being less frank than Meany, has echoed the notion by saying workers should "... not be forced to resort to strike action that endangers the health and safety of the public." Other union bureaucrats can be expected to capitulate to the capitalists in similar fashion. Surely John L. Lewis spoke the truth when he once called the workers' situation under the union bureaucrats one of "Lions led by asses."

In the conflict now developing a fighting union leadership would launch a political struggle in defense of labor, starting from the realities of the present union situation. One thing needed is a giant Congress of Labor. Massive assemblies, uniting all sections of labor, should be convened in Washington, at state capitals and in major cities. Notice should be served on capitalist politicians that their strikebreaking must cease and all anti-labor laws must be repealed. To show that the workers mean business, these demands should be backed up by mass demonstrations and protest strikes.

Steps should also be initiated by such a Congress of Labor to launch an independent labor party. Only then will it be possible to put in public office men and women who, as genuine labor representatives, will uphold and defend working class interests on all questions.

# New Threat to Independence of Unions

Current thinking in Washington about stiffening the Kennedy-Landrums-Griffin Act has been summed up by A. H. Raskin of the *New York Times* editorial staff, who is in a good position to get the facts. "The federal government, which passed a law less than a decade ago to insure more democracy in unions," he wrote on Jan. 8, "is beginning to worry now about too much democracy in unions."

His estimate of contemplated changes in K-L-G not only suggests the nature of impending government action against labor; it calls to mind the Socialist Workers Party's analysis of the law when it was passed in 1959. When capitalist politicians pretend concern about bureaucratic abuses of democracy within the unions, the SWP said the real aim is to raise false hopes that the rank and file can rely on the government to uphold their rights. It is a trick designed to get workers to accept government intervention in internal union affairs.

The government's immediate aim is to scare the union bureaucrats and make them even more servile to capitalism than they already are. A more basic objective is to strip the unions of their autonomy and make them state instruments for policing the working class.

Adoption of the Kennedy-Landrums-Griffin law was preceded by an extended period of deliberate preparation that began during Franklin D. Roosevelt's first term in the White House. A myth was fabricated that modern unions owe their existence to the federal government, especially to Roosevelt's "New Deal." The Wagner Act of 1935 was given a phoney buildup as "Labor's Magna Charta," and it was falsely credited as the main organizer of industrial unions in basic industry. The object was twofold: to tie the workers to

capitalist politics out of unearned gratitude and misplaced trust; and to lay a foundation for justifying government regulation of the unions.

The Wagner Act disapproved certain "unfair practices" by employers; for example, compelling workers to sign individual "yellow dog" contracts or to join company unions; and it disapproved openly firing workers for union activity. All this amounted to nothing more than recognition of labor's right to organize and bargain collectively.

In the actual class struggle, union protests about violations of the Wagner Act were brushed aside by the corporations and usually pigeon-holed by the government. It took the bitterly fought 1936-37 wave of sit-down strikes for the workers to assert their constitutional rights.

## The NLRB

The Wagner Act also established the National Labor Relations Board, empowering it to conduct union representation elections and to approve or void the results. With unions filing notice with the NLRB of intentions to call a strike, it joined in government maneuvers to prevent walk-outs or wangle a strike settlement on terms favorable to employers. As time went by the NLRB increasingly took on the characteristics of an anti-labor relations body.

This trend was accompanied by a steady drumfire of propaganda calling for a "balancing of the rights" of capital and labor through "equalization" of the law. Roosevelt applied this concept in various ways to keep labor hogtied during World War II. Then, with adoption of the Taft-Hartley Act in 1947, the government openly instituted proscription of alleged "unfair practices" by labor, doing so for the sole purpose of

weakening the union power.

General awareness of provisions in the 1947 law tends to focus on the strikebreaking features, but it also included other vicious aspects. A ban was imposed on the closed shop. Through Section 14(b) the states were given a green light to pass anti-labor laws, centered around prohibition of the union shop. The NLRB was authorized to seek court injunctions against "unfair practices" by labor.

Taft-Hartley required unions to file considerable internal information with the Secretary of Labor. Included were copies of unions' financial statements, constitutions and by-laws, procedures in electing officers and schedules of initiation fees and dues.

As a condition for NLRB recognition, unions were required to have their officers sign a "loyalty" oath. This provision became an integral part of the general witch-hunt then developing in the country. The attack on civil liberties was later to reach its most extreme form during the McCarthy period, named after the infamous U.S. Senator who played the role of stalking horse for incipient fascism.

In January, 1957, McCarthy introduced in the Senate a resolution to set up a "Select Committee" to investigate labor "racketeering," a term applied by reactionaries to all forms of union activity. The committee was quickly formed under the chairmanship of Senator John McClellan, an Arkansas Democrat. McCarthy was put on the committee, but he died soon thereafter and, as the May 13, 1957, *Militant* put it "The late Senator Joseph McCarthy got a generally bad press on the occasion of his death."

Robert F. Kennedy, who had earlier served as an apprentice witchhunter under McCarthy, was made counsel for the McClellan



Committee. Later on, as attorney-general during his brother's administration, he was to spearhead a government vendetta against James Hoffa of the Teamsters.

McClellan opened the committee hearings with an announced intention of investigating various charges against union officials. The main charges were goon tactics against the rank and file, looting the union treasury and taking bribes from employers. As the hearings got under way the capitalist news media had a field day.

Good union men and women, who needed no McClellan to tell them about the wrongs inflicted by union bureaucrats, developed illusions about his intentions as they watched the hearings unfold. They began to entertain a hope that the government would actually do something to protect their rights. Not realizing that a booby trap was being laid for them, they favored what was taking place in Washington.

McClellan made the Teamsters his central target, starting with Dave Beck, who was then president of the union. Throughout the proceedings Beck relied on his rights under the Fifth Amendment. Hoffa, who was a vice president of the Teamsters at the time, got the next major grilling. While this was going on the real purpose was given away by Senator Lausche, an Ohio Democrat, who said on TV that the Teamsters were too powerful and should be curbed.

### Teamsters Suspended

Meanwhile George Meany had called a session of the AFL-CIO Executive Council, but not to mobilize united labor defense against the government attack. He put through a criminal decision that any union official who invoked his constitutional rights under the Fifth Amendment should automatically lose his post. Beck was suspended from the Executive Council for taking the Fifth. A few weeks later Hoffa — who had not taken the Fifth — was elected president by a Teamsters convention and, simply because he had become one of McClellan's targets, the Teamsters were suspended from the AFL-CIO.

Meany also moved to set up an "Ethical Practices Committee," not to establish union democracy, but



The Militant ran this cartoon in its April 8, 1957 issue, when the McClellan committee was investigating the Teamsters.

to serve as a bureaucratic police mechanism within the AFL-CIO. It initiated steps leading to suspension of five more unions which had been attacked by McClellan. Three were later reinstated after accepting a "monitorship" imposed by the Executive Council. In December, 1957, the Teamsters, Bakery Workers and Laundry Workers unions were expelled from the AFL-CIO.

On the government side, a federal judge used a suit brought by union members to impose a "monitorship" over the Teamsters and it was maintained for an extended time. During the same period the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that a scab can sue in the state courts for damages against a union that keeps him off the job with a picket line.

In November, 1958, the union bureaucrats hailed the election of a predominantly Democratic Congress. But when the new Congress opened, a series of new anti-labor bills went into the hopper and out of it came the Kennedy-Landrum-Griffin "killer law." Preparation for its passage was the central purpose of the McClellan hearings, and it passed the Demo-

crat-controlled Congress by votes of 95 to 2 in the Senate and 352 to 52 in the House. Although not a sponsor of record, John F. Kennedy was a principal architect of the measure.

This law tightened the provisions of the Taft-Hartley Act and extended them. Communist Party members were barred from union office, as were people convicted of felony charges, which may well have resulted from capitalist frameups during class struggles. (Later on the U.S. Supreme Court voided that part of the law.) Provisions were made for government supervision over the election of union officers, stewards, etc. Dissident members were encouraged to sue the union and its officers in the capitalist courts.

### Government Agents

The Secretary of Labor was given sweeping powers to investigate internal union affairs. He was empowered to send his agents into union premises and inspect membership lists, financial accounts, files and other records. These agents were authorized to question whomever they choose.

The law was designed to regulate general union procedures, including strike authorization and contract ratification. International officers were allowed to impose trusteeships over local unions to make sure that the membership abides by contracts with employers. The Secretary of Labor got authority to seek a court injunction when suspicious that a union "has violated or is about to violate" the law.

Under the Kennedy-Landrum-Griffin Act the government can put a political cop in any union hall, committee room or other working quarters. Such is the monstrous invasion of union autonomy that is palmed off as a "bill of rights" for rank and file workers. And now the capitalist politicians are preparing a new attack on workers who are fighting to defend their class interests.

According to Raskin's Jan. 8 article, "The Government's labor trouble-shooters estimate that about one-tenth of all their active cases now involve situations in which the union rank and file spurns agreements its leaders consider good enough to accept... Secretary Wirtz made known in a speech last week his conviction that the frequency of membership rejections is 'very, very dangerous for collective bargaining' . . . Already some experts are talking about the necessity for giving absolute authority to local and international union officers as insurance against the junking of agreements made in good faith."

### **Union Bureaucrats**

The union bureaucrats, who felt "betrayed" by the McClellan attack, can be expected to leap at the chance to get some government backing for their dictatorial rule over the unions. As for the capitalists, if they show no gratitude toward the labor "statesmen," they also have no fear of the sorry breed. Union bureaucrats are considered useable, or expendable, according to the given tactical needs of the capitalist ruling class. To get at the reasons for this attitude, it is useful

to examine the basic characteristics of the class-collaborationist union officials.

They defend the capitalist system: private ownership of productive facilities, profit gouging and all. Inside the unions they echo the aims and imitate the policies of the capitalist overlords. In the name of making capitalism work "equitably," they seek modest concessions to the workers. They relate themselves primarily to workers who are relatively better off under capitalism, relying in turn on support from that quarter to help maintain their dictatorial rule over the unions.

In keeping with that outlook, the union bureaucrats seek to discourage strikes, often acting as strikebreakers against their own rank and file. When they do feel compelled to identify themselves with a walkout, their main object is to get it settled quickly, no matter what harm is done to the union membership. For these reasons they gladly acquiesce in capitalist propaganda that strikes "endanger the national health and safety."

Growing increasingly employer-minded as they accumulate big union treasuries and gain in personal affluence, the bureaucrats look upon themselves as social "stabilizers." At all times — and doubly so in time of war — they strive to prove their devotion and use-value to the capitalist government.

In return for this servility they entertain vain hopes of winning the government over to their side in collective bargaining disputes with the corporations. That in turn leads to acceptance of government regulation over union-employer relations. And in this way the door is opened for direct government intervention inside the unions. Bureaucratic rule within the unions thus leads to the subverting of labor's inherent power to alien class interests at increasing cost to the working class.

### **Will Police Workers**

Willing though the bureaucrats are to serve the capitalist govern-

ment, the ruling class is losing confidence that, acting on their own, they can continue to restrain the union rank and file. Hence the talk about giving the bureaucrats quasi-governmental powers to police the workers. This changing outlook stems from the deepening crisis of U.S. capitalism which, already dangerous abroad, is growing more severe here at home. That is why the capitalist politicians are preparing new repressive laws which can be expected to impose increasingly harsh government regulation of union activity and internal affairs. The basic trend is toward stripping the unions of any semblance of independence and converting them into company unions at the government level, that is to say, a direct police arm of the capitalist state.

The long period of relative prosperity cushioned the impact of previous government attacks on the unions, but now things are changing. Lately the workers have shown a growing inclination to fight the employers, resist government intervention in strikes, and criticize the union bureaucrats. The sharpening class struggle implied in this trend forecasts stiffening workers opposition to anti-labor laws. As the process intensifies, the total bankruptcy of the union bureaucrats will become more apparent to the membership and a change in leadership will become the order of the day.

Militant workers preparing for that development need both a clear program and a sound strategy. Bureaucratic rule over the unions must be broken — and rank-and-file control established — without yielding an inch to the capitalist government. Defense of workers' democracy must also include a fight for unconditional independence of the unions from government control. Central to that fight must be a complete break with the Democratic Party of big business, and the political arming of the workers to carry the class struggle onto the governmental plane through their own independent party.

# The New Left and the Working Class

Many young people consider trade unions incapable of looking beyond narrow questions of wages and job control. On broader issues they see the unions backing capitalist policy and this causes them to view the workers' mass organizations as instruments of repressive capitalist rule, against which youth are beginning to revolt. They make little distinction between the bureaucrats, who are responsible for reactionary union policies, and rank-and-file workers, who are victims of those policies. As a result many youth tend to write off the working class itself as a progressive social force.

Theoreticians of the "new left" seize upon such prejudices against organized labor and give them a sophisticated twist. As they put it, workers are job conscious rather than class conscious. The failure of union bureaucrats to organize white-collar workers in a changing labor force, which conjuncturally weakens the relative weight of the unions, is misinterpreted as an absolute narrowing of the labor base within society. Reduction of productive manpower through technological change is taken as a sign that strikes are losing their value as a means of struggle. The relative decline in union strength due to bureaucratic misleadership is held to reflect an ebbing of labor's former ability to play a vanguard social role.

## Objective Reality

Behind these dire forecasts of developing labor impotence lies an incapacity to perceive objective realities, which are presently obscured by factors that have given rise to the myth that the United States is exempt from the laws of capitalist development. One "new left" school holds that a permanent war economy assures continuation of relatively full employment; and there are built-in stabilizers to cushion the impact of conjunctural economic down-

turns. On this basis welfare state policies will remain able to appease economic discontent. This in turn bars radicalization of the working class and renders U.S. capitalism immune from the crisis predicted by Marxists.

Some "new left" thinkers take exception to the full-employment thesis. They see automation creating a new pattern of structural, instead of cyclical, unemployment. That, in turn, will give rise to a permanent and growing mass of jobless persons, who will stand outside organized labor's natural milieu and the unions, it is argued, will have little or nothing to offer them.

The "new left" seems generally agreed that revolutionary socialism is dead as a force within the working class, killed by a com-

bination of New Deal politics and cold-war conformity inside the unions. As proof they point to widespread reformist illusions among the workers, their present integration into the capitalist social order and the isolation of radicals from leadership roles in the unions. Revolutionary socialists are accused of holding romantic notions about the workers and of arbitrarily assuming that most rank-and-file unionists are class conscious. "New lefters" are advised by their mentors to shun such romanticism and to concentrate attention on young people who never experienced the history of the "old left."

Turning to their own perspectives, some on the "new left" pose as a key problem capitalism's ability to absorb dissident pro-



**RECENT STRIKE.** Workers at Honeywell in Minneapolis recently showed determination to fight in face of union bureaucrats' willingness to capitulate to employers.

grams and leaders into the prevailing modes of political rule. In their view this does more than retard development of class consciousness. Given the new era of technology, it casts doubt on the possibility of political independence for any section of the population.

### Secondary Bureaucrats

Divergencies then arise over what to do. One school thinks "social unionism" — defined as adaptation of New Deal ideals to trade union strategy — can accomplish something. Exponents of this view would place reliance on the second echelon of trade union officials. The top bureaucrats are considered too far gone for salvation, while the union membership is too heavily permeated with middle-class values. Under the leadership of secondary union bureaucrats, it is held, labor could at least carry some weight in forcing social concessions from the capitalist class.

Other "new left" theoreticians consider "social unionism" incapable of developing a meaningful program for social change. They advocate a coalition of "radical constituencies" designed to enable democratic participation of the masses in economic, political and cultural affairs. Two general types of "constituencies" are projected: one based on class or social groupings, the other built around specific issues. Proponents of this line take for granted a perspective of cutting across class lines to speedily build a coalition large enough to contest for political power.

Such a coalition would rally forces by calling for a "democratic revolution." In this way decision making would be transformed everywhere, with the oppressed masses intervening in government and taking a hand in deciding national policies. The coalition's message would imbue people with an understanding that change can be achieved by concerted social action, thereby giving it a long-range strategy having political relevance. Stress would be put on immediate demands, avoiding the "old left's" intangible long-range goals that lead to a stillborn movement. A fight would be made for structural reform within the capitalist framework, on the premise that the solution of immediate problems requires deep-going changes in the

nature and priorities of existing society.

Radicals in the coalition would recognize the irrelevance of counterposing anti-capitalist political action to realignment within the present two-party system. The coalition would proceed on the premise that a realignment is now taking form within the Democratic Party. Its aim would be to inject "independent politics" into the realignment in the form of the "radical constituencies" structure of ideas.

Summarized in composite form, such is the fallacious theoretical structure now emanating from "new left" circles. With the Communist Party and the social democrats trying to latch onto the "new left" with their own brands of class collaboration, the confusion becomes thrice-compounded. Young militants, who are looking for a meaningful way to resist oppressive capitalist rule, find it hard to untangle the resulting political snarl and get at the truth. To help them do so, it is necessary to begin with the basic features of class struggle.

Labor's historic role is determined by fundamental relations between the exploited and exploiting classes within capitalist society, not by the given state of social consciousness among workers. Generally speaking, a young worker in contemporary U.S. society comes into the labor force brainwashed from childhood by a complex process of capitalist propaganda. At the outset he tends to consider employer domination over his life a normal, even necessary, state of affairs.

### Class Consciousness

His first social awakening usually occurs over simple job issues, such as wages and speedup. From his own direct experience he learns the need for a union at his own place of employment and for workers generally. He has then begun to attain class consciousness, but only in the most elementary form and to a very limited degree.

Although he now starts to perceive the class antagonisms within industry, the worker still doesn't know why capitalists must act the way they do under the operation of the system. He thinks his problems can be solved by

economic means and, although he begins to oppose the employer on the job, he continues to trust capitalist politicians. It is this political backwardness that union bureaucrats and liberal politicians seize upon to help perpetuate labor subservience to capitalist rule. It requires time and experience—and a series of social shocks—for a worker to see through the political trick played on him.

As a class, workers accept capitalism so long as they retain hope of solving their problems through reform measures, however slow and prolonged the process may be. Up to a point, they will also tolerate setbacks under the system, if not too severe and lasting. Reformism loses its hold over the workers only when it begins to produce losses with the prospect of even worse to come. Only then will a mass labor radicalization start to take hold.

Up to now accommodation to the system and reformism have prevailed in this country because capitalism has possessed sufficient wealth — already amassed through super-exploitation of labor — to make concessions that appeased working class discontent, especially within the unions. On that fundamental basis the union bureaucrats were able to devise a narrow, class-splitting policy that enabled them to hold dictatorial sway; they did so by basing themselves on workers who are relatively better off under capitalism.

An example is the policy of seeking "fringe benefits" in union contracts, such as health and welfare plans, pension funds and supplementary unemployment benefits. This policy divides and weakens the class in several ways. In separate collective bargaining procedures, stronger unions leave weaker ones on their own. The unions as a body leave unorganized workers out in the cold in these matters. Organized class pressure that should be put on the capitalist government to provide for the social needs of all workers is deflected away from Washington, and the union bureaucrats find it that much the easier to keep labor tied to capitalist politics.

### Conservatism

Factors of this general nature, along with an extended period of relative economic prosperity, have

had their effects on the organized workers' mode of life and patterns of thought. Their sense of class solidarity at the union level was somewhat undermined and their feelings of hostility toward the industrial overlords lessened. Conservatism was generally strengthened in the unions and the bureaucrats were able to ride roughshod over dissidents in the ranks. Worker allegiance to the unions faltered, in some cases under the euphoria of good times, in others because the unions failed to meet given needs.

Today, however, the objective need for more aggressive tactics by the unions is beginning to reassert itself because of developing adversities. Consequent changes in rank-and-file moods are reflected in patterns of growing militancy. Broadly speaking, the present union struggles are limited to defense of buying power and jobs under the impact of runaway prices and the spread of automation. Under modern conditions labor can scarcely be said to have gone on the offensive against capital until significant motion develops toward a break with capitalist politics.

A significant feature of the change is the speed of the shift in working class moods. After an extended period of relative prosperity for a majority of the class, it has taken only a rather brief period of threats to existing living standards to provoke strong reactions among the workers. The abrupt shift reveals the develop-

ment of marked internal alterations within what remains a relative political equilibrium between labor and capital.

It will take more than token concessions to alter the present trend toward increased labor militancy. This is shown by the manner in which union members are here and there rejecting contract settlements negotiated by the bureaucrats and sending them back to get some more from employers. Furthermore, when compelling needs are felt, concessions won have the effect of stimulating further struggles around demands based on the workers' needs.

As labor struggles intensify in coming times, doubters of the "new left" will find that the workers' fighting capacity remains intact and is becoming reinvigorated. Young workers are gaining increased weight in the union ranks and some are finding their way into union posts. They bring with them the drive, resourcefulness and daring of youth.

#### **Role of Young Workers**

These young workers have much less interest in "fringe benefits," such as pensions and comparable matters, which preoccupy the older ones. They are vibrant with life and they want the wherewithall for a good life — right now. As draft bait they are not at all indifferent to the Vietnam war. There are signs that some of them are watching the civil rights movement and borrowing from its tactics; for example, holding a sit-in at union headquarters to pressure

bureaucrats, who signed a no-strike contract, to get out to the plant and act on grievances. As they move into action over issues of concern to them, the young workers won't be easily cowed by union bureaucrats, corporation heads or the capitalist government.

Those in the "new left" who think automation is negating the value of strikes as a means of struggle will get their answer from the workers themselves. Time and events will show that neither the working class nor its traditional weapons have been outmoded. The working class retains its strategic role in the capitalist economic complex. It also possesses vital and distinctive characteristics as a relatively homogeneous social formation. Only one key factor is still lacking — class political consciousness.

Political radicalization of the class will be preceded by a further complex series of thwarted hopes, setbacks and doublecrosses at the hands of capitalist politicians. Even when labor moves to form its own party, the step will most likely begin around a program of reforms. New experiences will then be needed before thoroughgoing anti-capitalist radicalization assumes primacy within the working class. Before going into this more advanced aspect of class struggle dynamics, however, it is necessary to examine the problem of creating an independent labor party based on the unions.

# The Case for an Independent Labor Party

Unlike "new left" theoreticians, who consider labor incapable of forming its own independent party, many union bureaucrats know that the step could be taken at any time. On occasion some labor officials even talk openly about such a perspective. They do so only to throw a scare into liberal capitalist politicians, who are equally aware of the unions' capacity to shape an independent political course.

When it comes to passing from the word to the deed, the bureaucrats always draw back, arguing that now is not the time for a labor party. They persist in clinging to the nineteenth-century political mentality of Samuel Gompers, founder of the AFL.

Gompers laid down a basic line of pure-and-simple trade unionism, designed to build a wage-conscious instead of a class-conscious movement. Labor's interests were identified with those of capital. This meant de facto acceptance of the trickle-down process whereby profits come first and the workers get leftovers. The line required union business agents to show moderation, respectability and statesmanship in their relations with capitalists; it also called for a no-strike clause in collective bargaining agreements and the arbitration of any and all grievances.

Politically the workers were subordinated to capitalist rule through a tactic defined as "rewarding friends and punishing enemies" among capitalist politicians. In practice this added up to horse-trading the labor vote between Democrats and Republicans.

## Gompers' AFL

Gompers deliberately based the AFL on skilled craftsmen, who were in a relatively favorable position as workers to exact wage concessions from the capitalists. Less-privileged sections of the

class were more or less ignored. As a result a majority of the workers remained atomized organizationally and history was to prove the AFL an obstacle to unionization of the class as a whole.

During the labor upsurge of the 1930s, stimulated by deep economic depression, the defects of craft unionism became glaringly obvious. Finally the AFL had to be bypassed before the workers in basic industry could be organized in the necessary industrial form. The organizational turn came through a minority split from the AFL, led by John L. Lewis, who initiated the building of the CIO.

With this step the composition of organized labor underwent a decisive change and the CIO, based on mass production workers, became potentially the most powerful class force in the country. Also new was the fact that union labor was now up against the strongest section of the capitalist class, the giant monopoly corporations and the bankers who stand behind them. The CIO ranks were ready for battle and they backed Lewis to the hilt as he led them in militant strikes for union recognition and collective bargaining agreements. At that point, however, Lewis stopped short.

Politically he tied the CIO to Gompers' basic line of substituting reliance on capitalist politicians for use of the workers' power. Having a bigger problem than Gompers faced, Lewis also had a larger hope. He dreamed of winning the cooperation of the capitalist government in the fight against the monopoly corporations. That in turn led him to modify Gompers' tactical methods.

Lewis turned away from political bartering between the two capitalist parties, shifting to faction politics within one of the parties through what has since been known as the labor-Democratic coalition. The Democrats were

chosen as the popularly accepted party of reform, whereas the Republicans are generally looked upon as the party of the status quo. To initiate the tactical shift Lewis set up an extra-union formation called Labor's Non-Partisan League. The LNPL was masqueraded as a step toward independent labor political action, but its real function was to serve as a political vehicle for union support to Franklin D. Roosevelt and the Democrats in the 1936 presidential elections.

Development of Lewis' political line coincided with adoption by the Communist Party of the "peoples front" turn decreed at the 1935 Congress of the Stalinized Comintern. The changed CP policy, falsely represented as a modernization of Lenin's principles in shaping working class united fronts, had as its aim to mislead the workers into crossing class lines in politics. In the 1936 elections the CP ran a presidential candidate, who gave left-handed support to the Democrats by campaigning against the Republicans. At the same time the CP hacks in the CIO more openly joined hands with Lewis in the LNPL.

The Socialist Party also ran its own candidate for president in 1936 and, unlike the CP, continued to do so until 1956. Meanwhile, social democrats inside the unions supported the LNPL tactical ruse. Little by little thereafter the whole social democracy shifted in that general political direction and today they are deeply enmeshed as a body in Democratic Party politics.

In 1936 the CP and social democrats had a problem with CIO members whose radical background made support of capitalist politicians a repugnant thing, especially in the case of New York garment workers. To get around the difficulty they organized the American Labor Party in New

York state as a special arm of the LNPL. The step was taken to trick the workers into thinking they had their own party.

Through that scheme they were dragooned into voting for Roosevelt on the ALP slate and, by means of a device called "fusion candidates," support was similarly garnered for other capitalist politicians running for key offices. In secondary instances token ALP candidates were put up to maintain a façade of political independence as a party. In time radical workers thus ensnared became disoriented into acceptance of the class-collaborationist political line.

#### "New Left" Thinkers

Some "new left" thinkers see in this phase of labor history little more than a sign that many radicals felt compelled to change their ideology. They put one-sided emphasis on capitalism's ability to allow a few social concessions. On that premise a conclusion is reached that the shift in ideology came about primarily because the "old left" had no strategy of opposition to absorption in a liberal consensus.

Revolutionary socialist criticism of labor's misleaders for crossing class political lines is discounted as conceptually dubious. Advocacy of an independent class-based political course is dismissed as narrow and doctrinaire. If "new lefters" holding these views are not trying to warp reality to fit their own preconceived notions, it can only be said that they fail to understand the meaning of history.

Getting back to the realities of the situation, by 1937 Lewis began to react in his own way to contradictions stemming from labor's support of the Democrats. A key factor was Roosevelt's repudiation of a CIO strike in steel. That year Lewis publicly suggested the possibility of labor and the farmers building a political alliance through their own party.

The CP reacted by starting a campaign to put the CIO on record for re-election of Roosevelt to a third term in the presidency. When a resolution to that effect was introduced at the 1938 CIO convention, Lewis ruled it out of order. Then, in January 1940, he openly denounced Roosevelt and the Democrats, charging that they had "broken faith" with the work-

ers.

By that time the CIO was solidly entrenched in basic industry. Its ranks had been tested and tempered in strike battles, and bad experiences with the Democrats had taught them some political lessons. As a result millions of workers hopefully looked for Lewis to follow up his denunciation of Roosevelt with a call for a labor party. But he proved incapable of rising to the occasion.

In the 1940 presidential elections Lewis called for support to the Republican candidate, Wendell L. Willkie. He warned the union membership that failure to follow his advice would be taken as a repudiation of his leadership and, if Willkie was defeated, he would resign as head of the CIO. He did resign after the CIO ranks, left with only a lesser-evil choice between capitalist politicians, disregarded Lewis' appeal and helped re-elect Roosevelt.

It should be noted in passing that with the signing of the Stalin-Hitler pact in 1939 the CP had begun another of its zig-zags in policy. In 1940 the CP ran its own presidential candidate, who gave veiled support to Willkie by campaigning against Roosevelt. A year later Hitler invaded the Soviet Union and overnight the CP swung back to support of Roosevelt and of U.S. imperialism in World War II. Since then the CP has never put up its own presidential candidate, nor has it ever gone beyond running an occasional token candidate for minor public office. It has stuck to its "peoples front" line down to this day.

Another thread in labor political history that requires tracing concerns unions that stayed with the AFL in the split of the 1930s. They were slower than the CIO to make a tactical shift to the labor-Democratic coalition. Even though most AFL unions supported Roosevelt, they still tended in elections for lesser public offices to switch back and forth between Democrats and Republicans. Meanwhile several factors began to impel them toward general acceptance of the CIO tactical line.

After the split a few AFL unions started to compete with the CIO in basic industry. To the extent that they succeeded the composition of these unions began to change and the top officials found

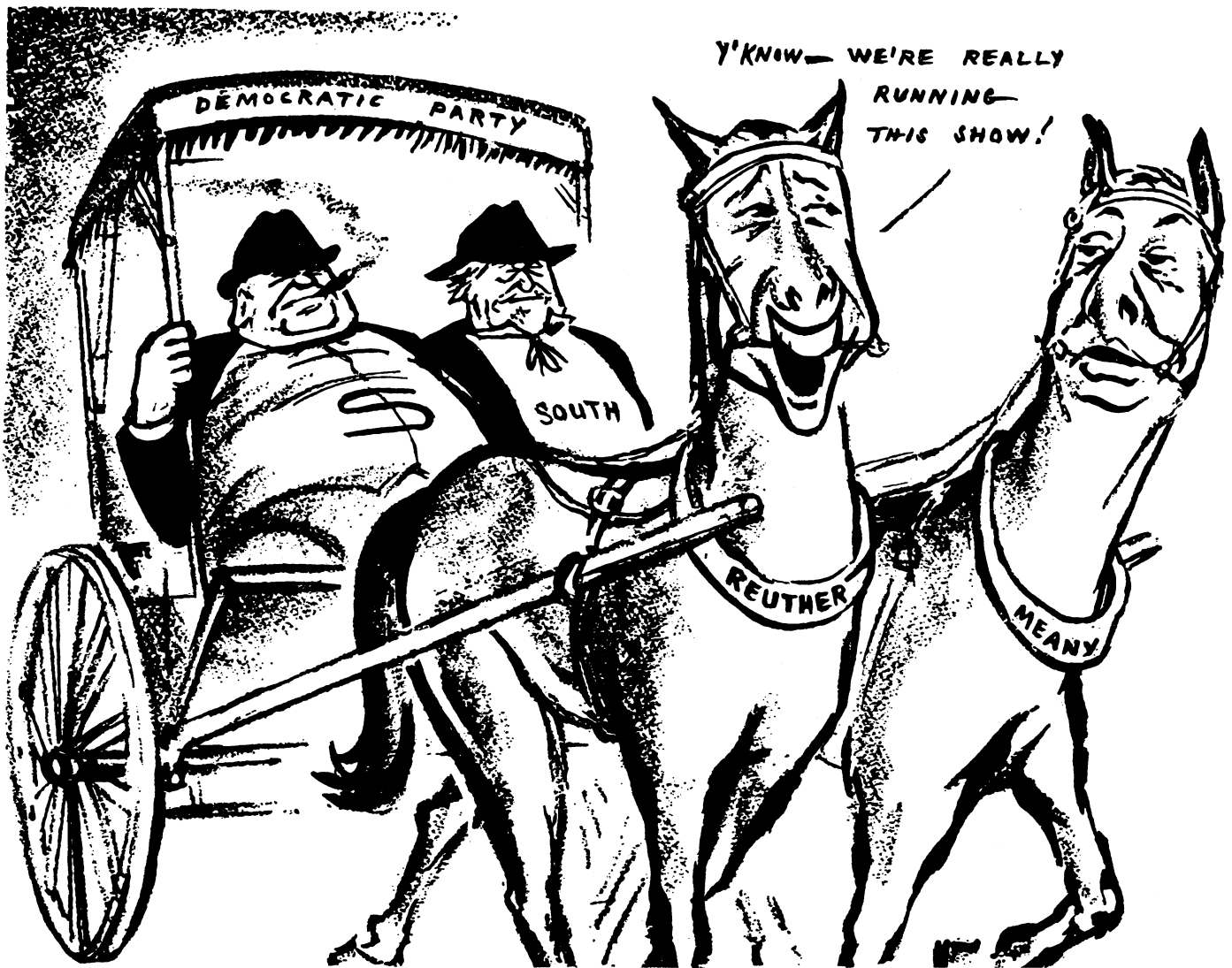
themselves up against problems similar to those Lewis faced in launching the CIO. This pushed them toward acceptance of Lewis' initial political tactics. AFL bureaucrats, who had feared that Lewis was precipitating a labor party to which they were opposed, also began to take note that their counterparts in the CIO appeared to have warded off that possibility. Passage of the Taft-Hartley Act in 1947 — and then the 1952 election of Eisenhower as a Republican president — finally prepared the AFL bureaucrats generally for cooperation with the CIO in the labor-Democratic coalition.

As usual, they had things hind-side to. For the first time since the main sections of the union movements threw their support to the Democrats, the Republicans had captured the White House. It showed that organized labor was losing any capacity to influence national politics and that the situation would continue to deteriorate until the unions formed their own independent party. Instead of taking that course, the bureaucrats of the AFL and CIO decided to combine their forces in support of the Democrats.

Toward that end they merged the two federations in 1955, subordinating other differences to their common political aims. The main object was to put the Democrats back in power. In return they hoped to wheedle the softening of anti-labor laws and the passage of some New Deal type social legislation.

In 1958 the union bureaucrats hailed the election of a predominantly Democratic Congress from which they expected some down payment for their support. They got the Kennedy-Landrum-Griffin Act. Under the Kennedy and Johnson administrations, following Eisenhower's second term in office, new highs were set in government strikebreaking. The few social measures passed in Congress boiled down to meaningless tokenism and gradualism, failing utterly to meet pressing mass needs. Between them, Kennedy and Johnson plunged the nation deeply into a war of aggression against the Vietnamese.

Until the fall of 1966 the union officials nevertheless thought they were riding high politically. They



had been buoyed up by the 1964 Democratic landslide, resulting from a combination of anti-Goldwater sentiment and Johnson's demagoguery. Great hopes were pinned on Johnson and the reinforced liberal bloc in Congress. Then came the post-election doublecross of every section of the mass movement.

In the unions' case the Democrats reneged on their promise to repeal Section 14(b) of the Taft-Hartley Act empowering states to pass anti-union laws. Congress was in the process of enacting a special law to break the 1966 airline strike when it was settled. Democrats were calling for a general stiffening of anti-labor laws. Modest union proposals for improvement of the federal minimum wage law were drastically whittled down. Congress pigeonholed labor demands for increased unemployment compensation.

This sorry performance in office backfired on the Democrats in the 1966 elections. Many labor-backed candidates went down to defeat,

as the Republicans scored a major comeback in Congress and in state and local elections. True to form, the union bureaucrats blamed everything but their false political line.

They said that a swing from the party in power had to be expected in an off-year election; that Johnson had hurt the Democrats by dismantling the organization built up by John F. Kennedy; and as a result the Republicans were able to do a better campaign job. In short, the bureaucrats talked about trivia, avoiding frank recognition of the voters' anger over the duplicity of the Democrats.

Despite everything, a majority of union members continued to vote for the Democrats, rather than support Republicans. At the same time the biggest percentage since the AFL-CIO merger cast their votes for some Republican candidates. What one bureaucrat called a "sullen reaction" of union members to official policy testifies to the growing alienation of rank-

and-file workers from the labor-Democratic coalition.

The relative homogeneity of the labor vote, which has existed since the 1930s, is beginning to break down. Prolonged adherence to the political tactics laid down by Lewis in forming the CIO has reflected the inherent tendency among workers, especially those engaged in mass production, to vote as a class bloc. When disenfranchised workers now begin to seek a way to express themselves through lesser-evil choices between Democrats and Republicans, it can mean only one thing. They are being prepared by political experience for a return in higher form to political action as a class bloc through their own independent party.

In the face of this objective reality the union officials offer the ranks nothing but more of the same. Stick with the Democrats, they urge. Concentrate on holding what we've got. Rely on the hard core of liberal Congressmen and lobby individual Republicans and



Southern Democrats on specific issues. Count on Johnson because he needs us; without us, he wouldn't have anybody.

The real political situation is that Johnson and the liberals will seek tactical advantage from the existence of a strengthened coalition of Republicans and Southern Democrats. They will use it as an alibi and a cover for a further general policy shift to the right, including harsher measures against the unions. At the same time they will go through meaningless motions to pretend consideration of actions to build a "Great Society." On the whole they will do little, while talking a lot, out of both sides of their mouths, in a bid for votes in the 1968 elections.

### Labor's "Friends"

Such a course is dictated for labor's political "friends" by the basic aims and needs of the capitalist class. Increasingly critical problems facing the ruling class are reflected in the present state of the Vietnam war and the repercussions here at home. That is why the capitalist government is preparing new blows against labor, aiming to further cripple use of the strike weapon and extend the exercise of direct police powers within the workers own organizations.

These basic objectives are included in the general orders issued to all politicians within the two-party system through which the capitalists rule the country. That accounts for the prolonged and sharpening attack on labor carried out by a sequence of Democratic and Republican administrations. The trend reveals the true character of the Democrats as agents of the ruling class. It shows the futility of labor seeking Democratic help against the big corporations, or the lesser capitalist fry either.

The record is full of evidence that the anti-labor assault can't be warded off by acts of appeasement. Every union concession is taken as evidence that increased capitalist pressure can force new capitulations. Step by step the unions are being stripped of their ability to talk the only language that capitalists understand—the language of power.

History has repudiated the union bureaucrats—and along with them

the social democrats and Communist Party leaders—in their policy of crossing class lines in politics. The false policy can't be rehabilitated by "new left" schemes to dress up class collaboration in the garb of "new politics" or "social unionism" or "radical constituencies." Nothing more will be accomplished than to help the union misleaders keep the workers tied to capitalist politics.

The "new left" devices are strikingly similar to Walter Reuther's quack "realignment" remedy for labor's political ills. He wants to get all the reactionaries together in the Republican Party and assemble all the liberals in the Democratic Party. It adds up to a typical piece of Reuther "planning" whereby he seeks to perpetuate the labor Democratic coalition.

George Meany and other officials from old-line AFL craft unions are showing a different tactical inclination. They are saying that labor could be more effective if it had less intimate relations with the Democrats. This understatement of the situation doesn't mean that they entertain notions of a break with capitalist politics. They are simply veering back toward the original Gompers line of political horsetrading between the Democrats and Republicans. They even did some trading of the kind during the 1966 elections.

Meany's tactics won't work any better than Reuther's. In both cases they merely reflect the floundering of the whole union bureaucracy in their deepening political crisis. Their situation is becoming so difficult that they are ready to try most anything, except take the labor party road.

It is no accident that the whole union bureaucracy is united in opposition to black power advocates within the civil rights movement. They are especially venomous against those who advocate an independent black party. These black militants are accused of conspiring to defeat labor's liberal "friends" at the polls.

The union officials are worried that emphasis on black power might lead to posing the question of labor power. They fear that the rise of an independent black party would accelerate labor party sentiment in the unions. On both counts there are grounds for such ap-

prehensions because what the bureaucrats shrink away from is exactly what must come to pass.

Pure-and-simple trade unionism has run its course. Objectively it was outmoded with the unionization of basic industry in the 1930s. Since then every major labor struggle has quickly assumed a political character, as Lewis seemed to anticipate. However Lewis' hope of getting government help against the corporations wasn't realized. Instead the capitalist political "friends" intervened against labor in every class showdown. And today, with the capitalists steadily tightening the screws on the unions, the workers stand disarmed politically.

These iron facts underlie the restiveness now evident in the union ranks. Although the present rise of rank and file militancy centers on defensive actions over economic issues and job conditions, there is more to it than meets the eye. The workers are beginning with a one-armed fight at the union level because their political arm is still paralyzed.

In coming struggles they will learn new political lessons from capitalist arrogance and hostile government interventions. The process will be helped along by intensified use of the unpopular Vietnam war as a pretext for strikebreaking. Accompanying this will be the adverse impact of the war itself on the workers' social needs. The consequences are already tentatively indicated by the support some unionists are now giving to the antiwar movement.

On top of this the government is repeatedly caught lying to the people and evidence mounts that it is shot through with internal corruption. The impact of these combined factors is leading to the development of anti-capitalist political moods in the union ranks. A meaningful sign of the trend was the action of West Coast locals of the Machinists union in raising the question of a labor party during the government attack on the airline strike.

Beneath these surface manifestations of a shift in working class political moods lie a series of factors showing the power of the unions to take the lead in organizing anti-capitalist political action, all of which merit close study.

# Labor's Role in Social Change

The labor upsurge of the 1930s remained confined within the industrial sphere for several reasons. It was a major leap just to bring the hitherto unorganized mass production workers together in the CIO and, in a series of fierce battles, to consolidate the union power on the job. In addition, a general belief prevailed that working-class problems could be solved by economic means and through union action alone.

Class consciousness lagged behind political reality, being limited pretty much to matters involving worker-employer relations in the plants. There was little knowledge among workers of the fundamental mechanics of the capitalist system. They neither understood the means available to the ruling class for undermining the union power, nor did they grasp the vital importance of class control over the government.

Illusions that definitive gains could be made by fighting for reforms under capitalism laid the workers open to political disorientation. The process was implemented by capitalist ability to make limited concessions through union contracts and in the form of social legislation. All this enabled the union leaders, social democrats and Communist Party officials to lead the workers astray politically. They were steered into the swamp of capitalist politics by way of misguided reliance on the Democratic Party.

Substitution of dependence on capitalist politicians for use of the workers' power, in turn, paved the way for bureaucratization of the CIO. Coming alongside the long-entrenched dictatorial rule over the AFL, this brought general strangulation of rank-and-file democracy within the unions. A witchhunt against radical unionists followed and, as a further

means to impose conformity in the ranks, the bureaucrats ganged up with employers against dissident workers generally. There were two primary objectives involved: at all hazards to keep union members strait-jacketed in class collaborationism; and to prevent the rank and file from intervening to bring union policy more into line with working-class needs.

After years of success in that endeavor, helped along by conditions of relative economic prosperity, the union bureaucrats are now running into some tough sledding. Discontent is growing in the union ranks as official policy falls more and more out of gear with the workers' needs. In an effort to get out of the resulting bind, the top officials pushed through the AFL-CIO merger in 1955. The aim was to resuscitate outlived official policy, not to fuse the union ranks for struggle in defense of working-class interests.

## Reuther-Meany Rift

Failure to solve the problem through organizational measures alone is shown by current development of the Reuther-Meany rift within the AFL-CIO. Like the merger 12 years ago, the present dispute at the top of the union hierarchy centers on tactical measures so far as the principles are concerned, rather than bearing evidence of any meaningful trend toward a change in policy.

At the outset Reuther appeared inclined to help keep the dispute confined within the AFL-CIO Executive Council. Since then he has altered his approach in the direction of an open confrontation with the Meany wing of the bureaucracy. It does not seem excluded that he might pull the UAW out of the AFL-CIO.

As matters presently stand, however, such a course by Reuther would lack the justification that

existed when John L. Lewis split from the AFL in the 1930s. A major policy issue was then involved. Industrial unions, embracing all workers in a plant as a united body, were needed to organize basic industry. Hard-core craft unionists in the AFL opposed the change in organizational form, insisting that mass production workers have their ranks carved up into a series of separate craft units. Lewis first made his fight within the AFL on the clear-cut policy issue of industrial unionism. He organized a split only when it became apparent that the AFL majority could not be budged on the issue. What followed proved the correctness of the split over this vital matter of policy.

## Declining Strength

Although basic changes in AFL-CIO policy are urgently needed today, Reuther hasn't qualified himself for leadership in that direction. He has tried to create a false appearance that he does so qualify by striking a demagogic pose in admitting the obvious: The AFL-CIO has been declining in strength and effectiveness; dissatisfaction with the leadership is growing in the ranks; and many outside the unions look upon the AFL-CIO as an upholder of the status quo.

Behind that façade of disarming frankness, Reuther merely dresses up in modified language the basic line he still clings to in common with the rest of the AFL-CIO bureaucracy: support to imperialist foreign policy; acquiescence in restrictions on the right to strike and government intervention into internal union affairs; opposition to the advocates of black power; and continued adherence to capitalist politics. In short, Reuther does not emulate the positive side of Lewis' course in clearly posing

at least one major policy issue, as was done on the question of industrial vs. craft organization. He continues instead to perpetuate Lewis' political blunder in tying labor to the Democratic Party.

Note should also be taken of Reuther's complaint about Meany's dictatorial methods as head of the AFL-CIO. Put into context with his own conduct inside the UAW, it shows that Reuther wants to have it both ways. How else explain his recent gangup with General Motors for a strikebreaking attack against UAW Local 549 in Mansfield, Ohio? To paraphrase a notorious remark once made by a GM executive, it seems that what's good for Walter Reuther is good for the labor movement.

Meaningful steps toward necessary changes in union policy must begin with open recognition of the heavy price paid for labor's entrapment in capitalist politics. It has included the slaughters of World War II and the Korean and Vietnam wars; perpetuation of second-class citizenship for minority peoples; grave erosion of civil liberties; poverty for many workers and growing threats to living standards and job security for all; tearing down of union conditions won through struggle; corporation arrogance and government attacks on workers' organizations.

These evils are producing a steady rise of political ferment

throughout the country. One consequence has been the unprecedented growth of a militant anti-war movement in the U.S. during a shooting war. Another result is appearance of the black power tendency. A comparable trend is now starting to develop within the unions; and to understand its fundamental significance, one must grasp the dynamics of labor struggle and the social power residing in the working class.

Prior to the social explosion of the 1930s, the workers had been relatively passive for years. AFL officials of the day gave organized labor, to the extent that it existed, an image no less unpretty than that now imparted to the AFL-CIO by the ruling bureaucracy. Many an "expert" was pronouncing the whole working class socially impotent. Then, like a bolt from the blue, the seemingly docile wage slaves confounded their detractors by launching a sweeping revolt.

#### Can't See Ahead

Today's "experts" say it can't occur again because higher living standards won through the unions have tamed the workers to capitalist rule. Failing to perceive that attempts to overcome mounting capitalist difficulties at labor's expense are undermining the present social equilibrium, they miss the significance of the dev-

elopement class antagonisms. They also mistake the conjunctural decline in union strength relative to the total labor force as evidence of fatal and incurable labor weakness. It happens, though, that such calamity howling has nothing to do with the real situation.

Despite weaknesses imposed upon them by bureaucratic misrule, the workers are no longer so atomized organizationally as they were at the beginning of the 1930s. The present union structure constitutes an adequate base from which to launch independent political action, parallel to intensified struggle within industry. Class morale is high. U.S. labor has never experienced a devastating defeat. Strikes have been lost and the workers have been disoriented and doublecrossed, but they have never been beaten down to the point of being cowed as a class. They retain full capacity to move massively — and swiftly — as coming events stir them into action.

The tempo of labor developments will be determined largely by the interplay of capitalist foreign and domestic policy. U.S. imperialism is running into ever-deeper trouble in its efforts to dominate the world and exploit it for the benefit of the capitalists who rule this country. Although domestic resources are being taxed increasingly to sustain the foreign policy, a comparable degree of capitalist crisis has not yet developed here at home. Social tensions are mounting, but the capitalists still have sufficient means to grant some token economic and social concessions designed to mollify mass unrest. As a result there will be various degrees of confusion in the developing social conflict, a process already reflected in the nuances of political change shown by the 1966 elections and its aftermath.

#### Coalition Weakening

A widening pattern of voter shifts back and forth between Democrats and Republicans has appeared, showing that the two-party system is losing internal stability. More concretely, it reflects a breakdown of the broad coalition around the Democratic Party. While this is a danger signal to the capitalists, their rule through the two-party monopoly is not yet in peril. Misleaders in



**AUTO WORKER STRIKE, 1937.** Militant strike struggles of the thirties set the pace for new and greater struggles in the period to come.

the mass movement can still keep the ranks tied to capitalist politics, but the job is getting tougher for them.

Under pressures of their class crisis, all capitalist politicians are moving steadily to the right in their policies. Liberals are turning "moderate" and conservatives more openly reactionary. As a result people disturbed about the status quo have a narrowing choice in trying to influence policy by casting a lesser-evil vote. This is causing some to grope toward a new political course, but their growing distrust of capitalist politicians has not yet overcome illusions that existing social ills can be corrected by reforming capitalism.

A characteristic example is the "new left" brand of politics. It adds up to nothing more than a left-liberal revolt against the Democratic Party's policy shift to the right. Programmatically, the "new left" advocates middle-class type reforms that in no way represent a break with capitalist politics. Tactically, the line remains one of maneuvering to oust the present leadership of the Democratic Party on the naive assumption that the party could thus be transformed. With their present illusions about liberals — and their general dependence on middle class forces — any break "new lefters" might undertake from the Democrats would most likely lead in the direction of trying to form a third capitalist party.

### **Progressive Party**

A preview of the self-defeating results of the latter course was given by a Communist Party adventure in 1948. At that time the Progressive Party — a third capitalist party — was formed to run a liberal politician, Henry Wallace, for President. Wallace criticized the cold-war policy then taking shape through Democratic-Republican bipartisanship, but in accepting nomination he stressed his defense of the capitalist system. When the Korean war began

two years later Wallace quit the PP and backed the bipartisan war policy. Thereafter the PP withered on the vine.

In assessing this episode, theoreticians of the "new left" do not reject the notion of forming a capitalist third party, they simply criticize the CP for poor tactical timing. Not enough liberals were ready for it, they argue, and anyway the effort could not succeed without major support from labor. Their whole approach is one of counseling reliance on liberal politicians, which has been proven a false course whether it takes the form of a labor-Democratic coalition or a third capitalist party.

Liberalism is rooted in the middle ground between the two main classes standing at the opposite poles of capitalist property relations, i.e., labor and big business. Its line is one of social reforms, so long as any measures undertaken are subordinated to preservation of the capitalist system. Liberals fear stormy mass movements and seek to substitute themselves for the masses in dealing with social issues. To the extent that they succeed, a false impression of their strength is created, especially when liberals are backed by the power of labor. Since that support is used to subordinate the masses to big capital, political independence from the ruling class can exist only in opposition to the liberals.

A step in the right direction has been projected by those who advocate independent black political action. It is implicitly anti-capitalist in character because of the class composition of the Negro minority. As a people they are mainly workers, thus representing the most oppressed national minority and the most militant section of the working class. They are also the most oppressed, exploited and downtrodden members of the class, whose demands in a large sense give expression to needs of all workers, black and white. Any steps they take to organize an independent party for

themselves will provide impetus toward building an independent party for the class as a whole.

### **First Stage**

Independent labor political action will likely begin around a program of reforms under the existing system. A vital new factor will nevertheless have been added to the social struggle because of the working class composition of a union-based party opposed to the capitalist parties. At the present historic stage, prolonged conditions feeding reform illusions within a labor party are ruled out. New experiences will speed radicalization of the party ranks at a relatively fast pace. As an instrument capable of quickly mobilizing presently unorganized sectors of the working class, a labor party will be able to bring the whole weight of the class to bear against the capitalist overlords through new and higher forms of struggle in both the industrial and political spheres.

In the process labor will be able to assume general leadership of all who are oppressed and exploited under capitalism. Fraternal cooperation between a labor party and any independent black political formation could be quickly established. Working farmers would come to identify their interests with those of labor. Instead of having capitalist ideology pumped into the labor movement by way of middle class elements, working class criteria would penetrate into at least the lower strata of the middle class, drawing them toward support of anti-capitalist political action under labor's leadership. Misbegotten reliance on liberal politicians would be scrapped. The way would be open for the workers and their allies to orient toward a struggle for governmental power.

Realization of that perspective entails the problem of shaping a working class leadership capable of going all the way in a showdown fight with the capitalists.

# Unions Need Class Conscious Leaders

Although efforts to solve capitalism's problems at labor's expense are gradually sharpening worker-capitalist relations, the clash has not yet developed beyond limited conflict within industry. Failure to take the necessary working-class action is due mainly to incompetence and timidity in union leadership. If ably led, the workers have the capacity to make an all-out fight on the job and to carry their struggle onto the political arena as an independent, anticapitalist force.

They lack only a leadership able to establish unity of action in labor's ranks and to mobilize the full struggle potential of the class. To fill the gap it will not be enough simply to replace the union bureaucrats with people who mean well but have not shaped a policy that meets the worker's needs. Solution of the leadership crisis requires formation of a left wing in the union ranks, democratically organized in support of a clearly-defined program of labor demands.

## Left Wing Program

Backing will be gained for a program that stems from the workers' immediate needs and their developing class sentiments. It should include rank-and-file control over union affairs; escalator clauses in all contracts, formulated to keep wages fully abreast of rising prices; reduction of the work week with no cut in pay; full compensation for jobless workers, including youth unable to find a place in the labor force; opposition to the Vietnam war; defense of the unconditional right to strike; and complete union independence from government control.

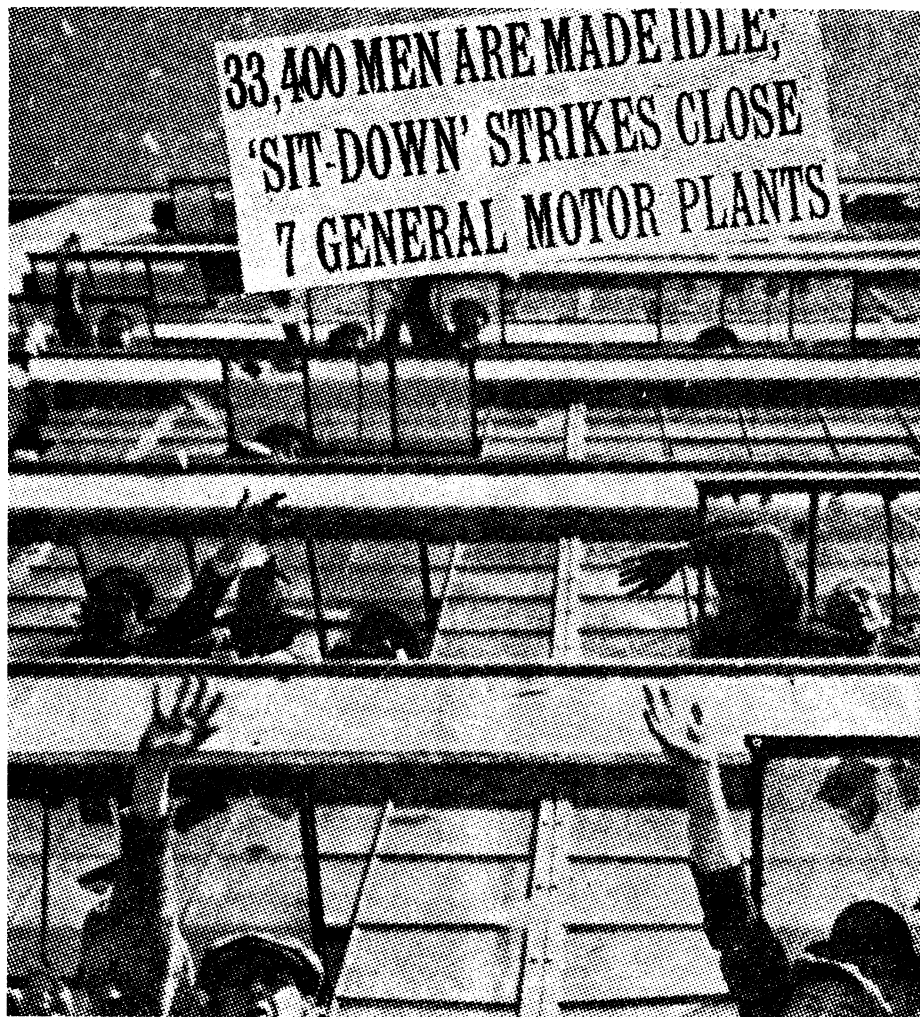
Concerted efforts are needed to combat racist schemes to pit white workers against black at the expense of the class as a whole.

Toward that end the left wing should demand equal rights for all workers inside the unions and on the job. Advocates of black power in the civil-rights movement should be given fraternal support and their example emulated within the unions by putting forward the concept of labor power. Recognition along these lines of the trail black workers are blazing for the benefit of all their class brothers

and sisters will help to overcome blind race prejudice. It will help to knit the black-white unity so urgently needed to advance general working-class interests.

## Class Struggle Concepts

In broad terms, a union left wing can have real meaning only to the extent that it strives consistently to help the workers shed class-collaborationist illusions and



**FAMOUS SIT-DOWN STRIKE IN AUTO.** Militant struggles of the thirties forshadow working class battles to come. New, class-conscious leadership is needed to lead struggle onto higher plane.

acquire class-struggle concepts. This leads toward full use of the union power in direct confrontations with the owners of industry over issues important to the workers. In the process they come up against interventions by the capitalist government on the side of the employers. Through these experiences an honest, knowing union leadership can teach rich lessons about the role of government in the class struggle and about the nature of the capitalist politicians presently running the government. The workers can be helped to grasp the need for organization of their own independent party based on their existing organizations, the unions.

When the unions are thus brought toward a complete break with capitalist politics, the road will begin to open for labor to take the general political lead against capital. Militants within all sectors of the broad mass movement can then be unified around a common struggle to promote anticapitalist political action. As the trend gathers momentum the way will be prepared for a direct challenge of the present capitalist control over the government.

With the union movement as yet only in a preliminary state of change, breakup of the labor-Democratic coalition still lies somewhere ahead. The workers remain in a highly contradictory stage of political transition, leaving uncertainties as to the immediate pace and scope of new developments. In this complex situation care must be taken neither to put forward slogans too advanced to make real connection with dissident workers, nor to overadapt to specific conditions and thereby de-emphasize labor's necessary political goals. The class vanguard's duty is to help the workers educate themselves and prepare to act on an ever-higher plane as they become convinced of the need. Efforts to overleap that process and inspire action simply by audacious leadership proposals can only misfire.

### **Contradictory Development**

The task of a union left wing is to develop step by step the unfolding of the historic course that is necessary and possible for the working class. As the desired

results begin to take form in real life they will not appear as simple, clear cut and uncontradictory as may have been anticipated in terms of pure theory. Continued backwardness on some important questions may obscure the fact that workers are becoming more advanced in their thinking about others. Experimental attempts can be expected to graft advanced ideas onto retarded forms of struggle, something like putting a souped-up engine in an old jalopy. This will probably be the case as the workers move toward independent class political action.

In the 1930s the workers first tried to organize in basic industry through the AFL, hoping to remake its craft-union structure to serve their industrial union needs. It took the failure of that experiment to prepare them for a mass shift to the building of the CIO. Today a somewhat analogous situation exists in the sense that the workers have yet to exhaust their efforts to solve essentially political problems through union methods alone. They are not ready to move forthwith to supplementary organization of their own independent party to add a higher form of struggle.

Within the unions, however, changes in the member's attitudes are taking place as they search for more effective means of struggle in defense of their class interests. Those who voice the workers' needs and show leadership ability in the search for a solution of their problems will get support. In this connection there is a positive side to the Reuther-Meany dispute. Although Reuther's leadership credentials are no better than Meany's, he has helped to open up a critical examination of union policy. Militants striving to forge a class-struggle left wing can take things from there, going beyond Reuther to initiate meaningful discussions in the union ranks.

### **Unity**

While stressing the need for effective changes in union policy, emphasis should also be placed on maintaining working-class unity against the capitalists. Labor's interests require opposition both to bureaucratic attacks on dissident union members and to government frame-ups of union offi-

cial, as in the case of James Hoffa of the Teamsters. The latter type of frame-ups are really aimed at the labor movement and represent a form of government intrusion into union affairs that bodes evil for the membership. Bureaucratic misleaders must be removed from union office, but not by the capitalist government. All union affairs must be handled by the workers themselves through exercise of rank-and-file democracy.

Primary attention should always center on the class enemy, with key programmatic demands aimed straight at the capitalists. If emphasis is put on a program meeting the workers' needs, and it is made clear that the left wing will support efforts from any quarter to carry out the program, the union bureaucrats will be caught in a bind. They must either respond to the needs of the membership or stand exposed as incompetent and unreliable. Instead of their being in a favorable position to witch-hunt the left wing, impetus will be given to sentiments for a change in leadership that are already developing in the union ranks. The trend is reflected in the ousting of McDonald, Carey and Burdon from top posts in the steel, electrical and rubber unions. It signifies a search for the kind of leadership that can be given only by a left wing based on a class-struggle program.

Palace revolts within the top bureaucracy, whether led by an Abel in the steel union or a Reuther in the AFL-CIO, will not halt disintegration of its monolithic control over the unions. Actions of the kind simply illustrate the basic contradiction in which the bureaucrats are caught. They want to collaborate with the capitalists but they have no use-value, even in that role, unless they control a union base. It is the latter need that they find increasingly hard to fulfill. Changing objective conditions are narrowing their chances of continuing to pose as labor leaders only to collaborate with the class enemy. As a result they are floundering around in an effort to stem the inevitable tide of rank-and-file revolt.

### **Cracks in Bureaucracy**

Growing pressures from the union ranks can also produce

fissures among lower-echelon bureaucrats who are in most direct contact with the workers. Instead of acting simply as policemen for the top-level dictators, some of them are beginning to feel a need for at least limited adaptation to struggle moods in the ranks. Worker militants can take tactical advantage of such developments, provided it is clearly understood that the leadership problem cannot be solved through self-reform within the class-collaborationist bureaucracy.

There can be no solution short of building a leadership based on class-struggle concepts, a leadership that emerges from a left wing dedicated to the basic perspective of rank-and-file control over all union affairs. Through such close ties between leadership and membership the full power of the working class can be mobilized. In action the workers will demonstrate their courage, resourcefulness, ingenuity — their capacity to change everything for the better.

In the coming struggles many tactical problems will arise that can be decided only on the basis of specific circumstances at the time. It does not follow, however, that tactical decisions can be made on the basis of mere improvisation. All tactics must point in the direction of labor's strategic needs. They must serve to promote a direct confrontation with the capitalists within industry and in government; and they must point toward a challenge of the lackeys of capitalism within the mass movement. Tactical decisions must in addition be linked up with persistent efforts to impel working-class sentiment in an anticapitalist political direction.

#### **Labor Party**

The first phase of anticapitalist political action will focus on efforts to form an independent labor party based on the unions. Even though such a political formation can be expected to have illusions at the outset about solving labor's problems through reform of the capitalist system, the class character of the party will make it inherently anticapitalist. This be-

comes the starting point from which to help workers perceive the need to struggle for governmental power and abolish the whole capitalist social structure. In the process union militants can be won over to acceptance of the socialist program. In this way formation of a broad class-struggle left wing will lead to growth of a conscious socialist wing; today through projection of anticapitalist political concepts in the unions; tomorrow through direct experiences in independent labor political action.

Theorizers of the "new left" fail to grasp the importance of forging a revolutionary-socialist vanguard party and working to fuse it with the exploited masses. Making a fetish of numerical strength, they brush aside the conscious socialist movement because of its present small size. To them nothing has meaning unless it is already "big." With that criterion they turn away from serious study of the laws of class struggle and search for the lowest common political denominator that will promote "bigness." As in other important matters, a vital need that they do not even begin to understand is blithely dismissed as "irrelevant."

History has proven time and again that sheer force of numbers does not assure a mass movement the attainment of its goals. On the contrary, if a movement lacks a class program and a class-conscious leadership, it will crumble in the test of battle, no matter how big it may be. In the last analysis the program decides everything, provided there is a leadership capable of carrying it out. That is why the building of a revolutionary-socialist vanguard party is so vital to the basic interests of the working class, and it is the reason for the existence of the Socialist Workers Party.

#### **Workers' Power**

Labor's future hinges on the construction of a party capable of shaping a program that meets objective class needs, a party able to carry through the struggle for realization of that program. Through its efforts, growing numbers can be helped to embrace

the socialist alternative to outlived capitalism and they can go forward with self-confidence in the struggle for the socialist goal. Their strategic objective will be the taking over of governmental power by the working class and its allies.

Attainment of that goal will end governmental control by bankers and corporation magnates, whose philosophy was once summed up in a single candid sentence uttered by Henry Ford II. "The target of private business," he said, "is private profit." That means merciless exploitation of people in this country and abroad for the sole purpose of amassing capitalist wealth. At home the policy leads to social deprivations in housing, health care, education, economic security, human equality, civil liberties and other needs vital to the kind of life people could and should lead, if our society was reorganized in a rational way. Abroad it leads to brutal wars against innocent people for the sole purpose of subjecting them to imperialist exploitation.

#### **Rational Society**

All this will be ended once labor and its allies take over the government and set out to reorganize society on a socialist basis. The banks and basic industries will be nationalized, as will the food trusts and all natural resources, including nuclear power. Necessary human labor will be arranged in a manner that provides jobs for all who are able to work and assures full care for those who can't. The workers and technicians will democratically organize, plan, and control production to serve everybody's needs on a fair basis. Society will be freed from every trace of discrimination and segregation. All will have an equal opportunity to prosper and to freely develop their human potentialities for the common good. Our country will lend a helping hand to peoples in other lands, instead of mobilizing and arming to make war on them.

Humanity will then be able to live in lasting peace, with freedom, equality and security for all. Man, as an intelligent social animal, will finally have come of age.