

STATEMENT OF THE NATIONAL COMMITTEE OF THE PROGRESSIVE LABOR PARTY

Communism in the Shops:

Put the Line On the Line

This article was written as part of the preparation for the 1978 PLP convention. It examines the PLP line on Revolution-and-Reform (R/R) in:

(1) union election campaigns; (2) contract struggles and strikes; (3) organizing a union; and (4) general day-to-day struggle in the shop.

I. General framework of revolutionary work in the trade union movement.

In our document on R/R we concluded that, as long as we make the reform struggle primary, we are not operating as revolutionaries and we will not make a revolution. We resolved to turn around our work in the shops and unions. Instead of fitting revolutionary work into the reform struggle, we would fit the reform struggle into the fight for revolution. As we have since found out, this is not just a simple changing around of a few words. It is one of the more difficult tasks we have ever set before ourselves, and we are a long way from making this change in practice.

We said that as long as we operate solely within the trade union structure, within the rules and laws set down by capitalism for unions (which, after all, is a reform organization), we will lose; that **ONLY** if we make the Party primary, establish a base for the Party's ideas, will we win. But, like everything else, this contradiction develops according to the laws of dialectics and has two aspects, primary and secondary.

While we aim to make revolutionary politics primary, and therefore not to operate according to the **content** of reformist trade union politics, we cannot—at least at this stage—operate completely outside the **form** of U.S. trade unions. That is, we must go to union meetings, we must fight on

grievances, we must participate in union elections, contract struggles and strikes, and, if there is no union, we must attempt to lead in the organization of one. That we say we want to immerse ourselves in this union struggle and yet "fit it into revolutionary struggle" appears to be a contradiction. It is. Again, it is a question of primary and secondary aspects.

Some comrades reacted to R/R in relation to unions by so dismissing the secondary aspect that they, in effect, completely negated the primary aspect of revolution and building the Party. That is, for some, union meetings, contract struggles, grievances, elections, etc., were all "reformist." Therefore, they put out a leaflet championing the dictatorship of the proletariat, expecting the workers to fall all over us. (This, of course, is exaggerating somewhat to make the point.) Not only was there little or no participation in the daily class struggle in the shop and union, but there was little or no base-building with workers from the job. So the revolutionary results from such activity in terms of building the Party were very meagre, if any. This is a Left cover for very Right opportunist work, which in reality isolates the masses from the Party's line on virtually every political question by having no one with whom to raise them.

On the other hand, there are those who have tried to fit the reform struggle into revolution-building by bringing the line into trade union reform struggles, more recently into election campaigns. But the pull of both the reform struggle itself, plus our own previous training, both in the Party as well as by the system, has many times swept us so far into militant reform struggle—with the apparent chance to "win"—that militant reform struggle, trade unionism, became primary and building for revolution, building the Party and moving the masses to the Left, became secondary. This is not the way we want the contradiction resolved.

Of course, there are examples where we concentrated on the primary while also dealing with the secondary—good beginnings on this score were made in the boilermakers union in Seattle and in the Local 1199 hospital union in NYC. In addition, some of our activity fell somewhere in between. That is, we would raise resolutions opposing apartheid in South Africa, or fighting racism in anti-busing movements, or endorsing

May Day, etc., in the shops and unions, some of it very much related to the union or company at hand. But we would often then either not follow through on it, or not build a base with particular co-workers. The result was that, while we did raise revolutionary politics, and while it was related to the struggle at hand, we didn't produce any real movement to the Left, any building of INCAR chapters or PLP fractions, or any recruiting to the Party. That is, raising political questions in the unions **without building a specific base among individual workers** is not a fair test of fitting reform struggle into revolutionary politics. Under current objective conditions, we won't recruit that way; workers won't automatically flock to our banners because we have the right line.

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Comrades, sorting out these contradictions and resolving them in a good way is admittedly a difficult question, given our past experiences under capitalism and our inexperience. It is sometimes a very complicated one. But it is by no means unsolvable. As we shall see, we have made some progress on it. But, given the fact that the current fakers who head the trade unions are more in the service of their ruling class masters than ever before, it is even more necessary that we confront them with our own leadership and line, leading masses of workers to create a counter-force, not so much to "make a better union" (although that might be a by-product of such an effort) but to build a revolutionary base. The real traitorous aspect of these sellouts'

actions is, not that they stand in the way of militant trade unionism (which they do), but that they **weaken the working class's ability to make a revolution.**

If our reaction to these sellouts is to turn away from the unions and from class struggle, because they corrupt it, then we will be leaving the field open for them and their system. It is our job to produce nuclei of strength (Party recruits and fractions, INCAR chapters) from this trade union struggle; nuclei which then become the levers for **mass leadership of the working class for power.** The question is, power for what? For a union that fights the class struggle "all the way?" Possibly, depending on how one defines "all the way." If that is limited to getting a better contract, it simply is not the power we're talking about. No matter how "better" the contract is, it will **always** be turned around as long as capitalism holds **state power**, as the militant miners are finding out.

No, we're talking about organizing the masses in the shops and unions to fight: against imperialist war; against fascism and the Nazis; against ruling class-directed racist movements, against the state apparatus of the bosses; against and around many of the questions that do not necessarily arise at the point of production out of the momentary antagonisms between workers and bosses. We may **start** from those antagonisms but, unless we bring in the whole world outlook of communist ideas, and therefore bring these workers as a fighting, Party-led force to bear on these larger political questions, we will continue to be chained to a capitalist-directed reform/trade union treadmill. In other words, we fight for power in the shops and unions to be able to move that power into the streets and against the state power of the ruling class, which exists **outside** the point of production.

A good example of this arose in a discussion we had with some miners during the recent strike. It was in mid-March, towards the end of the strike, and these two militant miners were getting frustrated with what appeared to be a "stalemate" backing the miners towards surrender. They recognized that the Party had some forces that could be used on their behalf and they wanted to know how we could combine forces to qualitatively advance the strike. We suggested that it was necessary to get other basic industrial workers actively

on the side of the miners. Specifically we proposed that they bring a group of 50 or 100 miners to picket the 18,000-worker Inland Steel mill, since it was using scab coal. For our part, we would try to win some number of Inland workers to respect such a picket line, maybe even join it, in an attempt to close down this giant steel company, even for a day.

The miners thought that was a great idea, but immediately asked what would happen if steel workers did refuse to work with that scab coal. We said the company would first probably try to get an injunction against the picket line (in addition to threatening to fire Inland workers respecting the line). We thought they would be able to get such an injunction. Then what? Well, then, if the miners try to continue to picket, the cops would enforce the injunction by arresting them. How would you combat that? By having the kind of base among steel workers (and miners) that would be prepared to challenge the state powers of the bosses. Do we have that at Inland? Probably not; **but carrying out this action would be a step towards getting that base.**

In other words, these miners concluded, "you're telling us that we can't fight out a 'simple' trade union strike without running straight into the full power of the capitalist class" (or words to that effect)? "Absolutely," we answered, Which is exactly why we say we have to build a party among these workers around revolutionary ideas to prepare them for such anti-capitalist battles. Out of such escalations of the class struggle, many more will understand that revolution, not reform, is the primary need, that they need to join a revolutionary communist party that is organizing for precisely that—revolution. The escalations of the class struggle will only occur if workers are following revolutionary ideas and leadership, outside the boundaries of capitalist laws and its reformist framework; and the conclusion that smashing the capitalist state apparatus and the dictatorship of the proletariat is the way to solve these contradictions will also only be understood if we are putting forward these revolutionary ideas **in every class struggle.** (This kind of work among these miners led them to join a Party study group and put them on the road to joining the Party itself.)

So fighting for "power in the unions" really means using all the union forms to enable the workers to use their collec-



PLP and Committee Against Racism members in Calif. demonstrate against U.S. support to South Africa

tive strength as a weapon against capitalist oppression, to fight capitalism as a **system**, to fight for revolution, to follow and join the communist party—PLP—that is organizing the class struggle in that direction.

At this stage, however, the program of an election slate or a strike or a unionizing campaign cannot simply be “Revolution!” Workers will be entering this struggle not necessarily based on understanding the need for revolution and a Party. (If they were, they would be in the Party.) Therefore, such a program has to take into account the secondary aspect of the contradiction, that we are still working within a reformist trade union structure and that workers, in most cases, are still thinking militant reform, not revolution. So we must put forward reform demands, but in a way that fits them into revolutionary understanding. This means that in addition to putting forward Socialism and revolution as an explanation of why, **by definition**, the pro-capitalist union leaders **MUST** sell out, we should also put forward demands that:

(1) escalate the class struggle (30 for 40: right and necessity to strike at ALL times; defiance of all boss injunctions; union leaders’ salaries not to exceed the

average worker’s; challenge all government intervention as boss-directed; across-the-board, not percentage wage increases; equal pay for equal work and raise women’s wages to that of men’s; defense of communist leadership of the rank and file; no alliance or deals with cops, courts, or other agents of the bosses’ state; etc.);

(2) fight racism (for preferential hiring where appropriate and upgrading where minority workers restricted to worst jobs; against any layoffs, especially since minority workers are usually affected first; eliminate racist job differentials and classifications; against segregation on the job; against racist practices in those areas where the main contradiction is between the system and the people served by the particular industry—hospitals, schools, welfare, other worker-directed services; against Apartheid in South Africa; smash the Nazis and Klan, etc.);

(3) build internationalism (against fascism in South Africa; against deportations—smash all capitalist-created borders; 30 for 40; expose “Buy American” campaigns as pro-boss, anti-“foreign” worker).

This by no means exhausts the list of demands and programs that will escalate

class struggle. In each shop and industry there are particular demands that will do so (the runaway shop, for example). But the main point is to put forward a program that relates to the immediate needs of the workers (and Socialist revolution is really the most important of those needs), a program that, if fought for, leads in the direction of challenging the capitalist system and its state.

Given that as a prerequisite, it would be an illusion to think that we could "win" a particular struggle and "then put a revolutionary line into practice." To attempt to escalate the class struggle without having prepared workers at the outset with some communist understanding, some idea of the kind of counterattack the ruling class will launch,

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is to "lead" them to defeat, cynicism, and into the arms of the pro-capitalist sellouts who they are trying to get rid of. That is why we say put Socialism and revolution "up front." Not just the words but the **ideas** and the **explanation** of why conditions exist as they do; why union leaders operating in support of the system must inevitably sell out; why these lousy conditions are part and parcel of a system that is based on profits and class rule by those who make the profits; why and how a revolution can change this, and therefore why we need a party, which they should join, etc.

Of course, all that can't be done in one leaflet or even in one speech. But the sum total of our agitation, literature,

individual discussions and base-building, speeches, chants and marches, songs, signs and banners, etc., in a particular struggle must add up to that. If this is the primary aspect of our work—fitting the reform demands into the goal of escalation of the class struggle to revolution—off as well as on the job, we will develop the ability to prevent ourselves from being swept up into militant reform struggle as the primary aspect of what we do. Otherwise, as militant reformers, we may do a lot better than the current fakers, we may even "win" the leadership of the workers as the "communist" parties of Western Europe have "won"—the better able to serve the bourgeoisie.

Sometimes it may seem that by making the particular reform struggle or demand secondary and revolution/building-the-Party primary, we are not really "interested" in the workers' needs, that we are just "fighting for the record," and not to "win." This is a lie spread by the bosses which infects many workers, including ourselves. We will examine what is "winning" in particular areas of struggle later on in this article. Suffice it to say here that:

(1) Workers can never win any demand permanently under capitalism—it will **always** be taken away at some point (ask the "tenured" teachers who thought they "never" could be laid off;

(2) Unless workers fight the bosses with some revolutionary understanding of the nature of the capitalist state, and what to expect from it if they go all out for their demands, any "victory" will certainly be short-lived, if gained at all;

(3) To be **really** interested in fighting for our best interests as a class means to fight against the system that is the cause of all our problems.

Those who say "don't bring in 'outside' issues," are, if honest, those who do not understand it is precisely those "outside" issues that directly affect their ability to win the demand at hand. As communists we make these issues the **main** arena of battle because we are truly interested in winning—winning **everything**. To restrict ourselves to fighting for one immediate reform is to lay ourselves open to constant assault from the bosses to compensate for any "gain," and keep us on a treadmill just to stay alive (not to mention the millions of deaths that are part and parcel of the capitalism system as long as we keep fighting mainly for that narrow reform).

There are some workers who will be convinced that just fighting militantly for reform will ultimately lead nowhere, but who conclude that "the ruling class and their state are too strong, why fight them?" This cynicism can only be overcome by vigorously pursuing our revolutionary line, escalating the class struggle in a mass way, both off and on the job, so that the Party becomes a real force in the class struggle. As the saying goes, "action speaks louder than words." We may not convince some workers who have become cynical—at least all at once—but there are many others out there ready to be convinced if we would but build a communist base with them.

If we pursue the goal of making revolution primary, of figuring out how to develop a reform program that fits into a revolutionary outlook and builds the Party, if we were to pursue all that **with the same passion** that many of us pursue the reform struggle, energetically engaging in election campaigns, strikes, contract fights, fighting racist firings, etc., we might get the kind of results we're looking for. If we devoted more of the time to insuring that we recruited to a fraction, INCAR chapter or to the Party and less of the time and energy to "getting the most votes," we would probably produce more long-lasting results and avoid becoming cynical or even dropping out of the Party and the struggle.

The role of our literature, especially the sale of **Challenge-Desafio**, in this process is **crucial**. To have regular sales at industrial concentration points, to sell subscriptions, to establish networks inside the work-places of non-Party workers (who thereby become potential recruits), means far more than we sometimes realize in putting revolutionary politics primary. We have often seen how the regular reading of the paper by some worker is the key thing that brings him or her around the Party and into class struggle on more revolutionary grounds. No matter how much we expose the corruption and anti-working class nature of capitalist ideas and culture, (all to the good that we do that), we are basically underestimating their influence unless we vigorously pursue the regular propagation of our communist ideas through the paper, as well as through shop or fraction papers, etc.

There is no substitute for developing a regular buyer of the paper. It represents a certain commitment by that

worker to our ideas and can very well lead to that worker coming forward in the middle of a class struggle in a decisive way. Similarly, the development of regular sellers of the paper—networks inside the plants—represents an even higher level of ideological struggle. These twin tasks are the living examples of our commitment to the primacy of political/ideological incentives over material incentives, a lesson we have learned from past experiences in the international communist movement, and which we say we want to practice in the future to guard against a reversal of the revolution, against revisionism. That, among other things, is what we are fighting for when we guarantee the sale of the paper, and the establishment of networks, especially to industrial workers.

Paper-selling and networks are not substitutes for base-building or for class struggle. They are an essential ingredient of both. Part of **communist** base-building is winning workers to buy and sell the paper regularly. And certainly ideology, in the form of ideas becoming part of the consciousness of workers through the the paper, can become a **material force** in the class struggle. So we cannot talk about putting revolution first, of fitting reform struggle into revolutionary politics, without carrying out a plan for the consistent sale of the paper and the establishment of networks, winning many others to take papers on a regular basis.

One final note here: there are those who will say that because PLP says we cannot take power in the unions through reform struggle, through elections, etc.—that is, because the ruling class will move to use its state power to crush us and therefore make the question one of its system rather than allow us to "take over the leadership" of important groups of industrial workers—that because of this view we "are not really serious" about running in union elections or fighting class struggle or "taking power." Such people say we are really "abandoning" the struggle in the unions.

While we discussed this distortion of our line when criticizing our practice of not participating in reform struggle, let it be stated here that: (1) we recognize trade unions under capitalism as reform, not revolutionary, organizations, whose goals are to fight within the system: (2) that our primary aim is to win workers to revolution and to join the Party, to move masses to the Left, not to "win" elections or grievances—if the latter be-

comes primary, we will stay on the treadmill of capitalism: and (3) we "take power" both through political control at the point of production (not through elections) and by constantly moving that political control against the capitalist state apparatus and against capitalism as a system.

This political influence might reflect itself in getting a majority of votes in this or that union election. But if we aren't prepared to act as a union official in a revolutionary way—that is, use the union position to build the Party; if we don't impel a political attack by the bosses once we assume our union position; if we haven't prepared the workers who elected us for this political ruling-class counter-attack, usually viciously anti-communist; if this is not the course of struggle after a victory at the ballot box, then we essentially have won nothing. If anything, we have either buttressed the system by showing how 'democratic' it is ("it allows a 'communist' to be elected"), or we have encouraged cynicism or hopelessness when we demonstrate that the "communist" good guys can't do much better than the evil sellouts we replaced since, in the short run, the ruling class is more powerful.

In the last analysis, those who profess to be communists but make militant reform the main question, while putting their communist ideas, at best, on the back burner, are really the ones who are abandoning the struggle for power. While the bosses don't necessarily like militant reformers, they can always turn them around and end up using them for their own advantage to maintain the bosses' state power. "Abandoning" the struggle for power in the unions must be viewed in class terms: are we preparing workers for smashing capitalist state power or are we feeding them illusions about what we can "win" under capitalism?

II. Communist campaigns in union elections.

In the past year we have launched a drive for the Party and INCAR to run in union elections. Why should we run when we say that not only is it impossible to take power through elections but also that the union is not the site of the fight for state power?

We are running these campaigns as part of "fitting reform struggle into revolutionary politics" because: (1) they can become forums for our communist

ideas; (2) they help stimulate class struggle on the job against the boss under our leadership; (3) they make communist ideas themselves a big issue; (4) they expose the bosses and the union sellouts even more sharply; (5) they put us on the offensive, to a certain degree, provided we run a vigorous, militantly communist campaign; and (6) under present conditions, they enable us to reach thousands of workers through union newspapers, mailings, union meetings and candidate debates, etc., which we probably would not have access to without running in such campaigns. No doubt there are more reasons, but these are enough to justify a big effort on our parts in every union we belong to.

"Why" we run can also be answered by the developing reactions from both the union "leaders" and the bosses. We find out from challenging these union fakers that they are extremely weak—**strategically**. In all of our recent campaigns, although in most cases we gained about 10% of the vote, we were attacked by the union leaders like we were about to execute them (they know what's coming). Even though they estimate that their strength is still vastly superior to ours (although they can never be quite sure about this), they usually tear into us with a vengeance. In District 1199 in NYC they accused us of "tearing the union apart," of splitting the union "just before contract negotiations," etc. The "Communist" Party, which supports the Davis leadership and has many organizer posts in the union, printed a half-page attack on us in their paper. Our members were threatened with being fired—all inspired by the union leadership—(three were—two on probation—after the election).

At another hospital union election in another city, among other things we were called "Nazis" on the eve of the election, in a spurious attempt to capture the anti-Nazi vote during a period when PLP was leading the attack against the local Nazi group in that city. In a transit union election, on the one hand many of the nine other candidates for president centered their attack on us; on the other hand, INCAR candidate for president was "offered" the local's nomination for Intern'l Secy.-Treas. at the next union convention (this is the union's biggest local). All this in situations in which the incumbent machine controls the entire election process, has their whole union staff at their free,

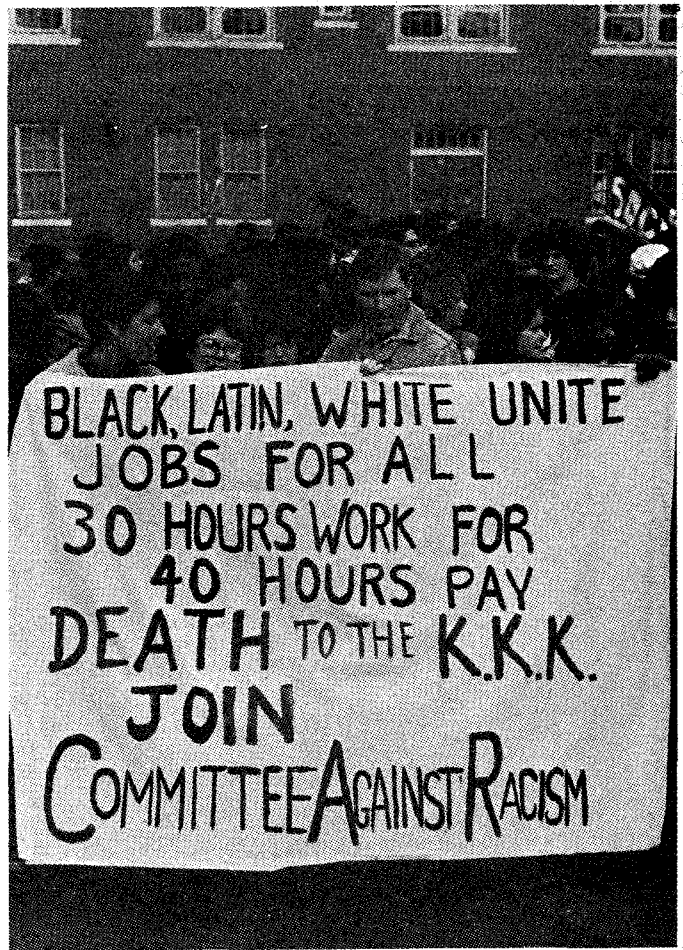
many times full-time, disposal to campaign against us, had dead people "voting" in the election, etc. And yet they're worried, abnormally, so, it seems to us.

But it's not really an "over-reaction." The fact is they **do** fear communist ideas like the plague. It is the one thing they find difficult, if not impossible, to buy off. They figure if we "make it up the first step," it will be that much harder to prevent us from getting further up the ladder. And if we do manage to dislodge them, they know it's all over for them. They no longer will be useful to the bosses, and will be dumped for a more able set of fakers the bosses can dredge up. All this desperation causes them to launch all-out attacks against us, so while they are extremely weak strategically, they are ruthless tactically. While it sometimes may seem to us like they are running no campaign at all, in actuality they are scheming behind the scenes (and sometimes right out front) to pull every dirty trick in the book to separate us from the workers, including expelling us from the union.

Usually (hopefully, from our point of view) this means a vicious anti-communist attack. Now, in the "old" days, when the enemy launched such an attack against the old CP, the latter adopted the stance that this was a "diversionary" tactic, red-baiting to get away from the "real" issues which these union leaders were never ready to deal with. There is an aspect of truth to that—if the CP'ers were leading some campaign for some militant reform, exposing the fakers running the union, naturally the latter would try to play on the anti-communism of the workers by making the "threat of communism" the main issue.

However, our reaction to drawing such anti-communist fire is "Great!" That's **exactly** what we want, to make communists and communist ideas the **main** issue, to show that these fakers sell out precisely **because** they are pro-capitalist, operate within the system and defend it. It is through provoking this anti-communism that we can bring our ideas more out in the open and before the workers, and fight the workers' own anti-communist ideas, which are fed by the bosses and their lieutenants in the unions.

Of course, if we are in the middle of leading a class struggle on the job, related to a contract or a strike, etc., the enemy will try to use anti-communism to split or defuse that struggle. In that



sense they want to use our campaign as a "diversionary" one. But our reaction must become not like the old CP ("all points of view should be allowed in the union"; and "communism is not the issue"), but must take this anti-communism head-on, explain what we're all about—and what they're all about—and at the same time **step up** the class struggle issue by broadening out its relation to many other issues, still another job of a communist. That's what linking Colgate's contract struggle in San Francisco to its plant in South Africa meant; that's what linking the rise of Nazi/Klan fascism to racist layoffs means; that's what linking the imperialist need for war, the intensifying competition faced by U.S. bosses, the resultant shortage of capital, to the NYC fiscal crisis and mass layoffs means; and so on. This, in turn, helps show workers how communist ideas can explain their plight and then what to do about it: join the Party, fight for socialist revolution, which we put up front in our campaigns.

Of course, when the incumbent "leaders" see us taking the issue of anti-communism head-on, of making it the main issue and showing the relation to all the other issues and to their own sell-out nature, they go wild and join with the boss to try to save their skins.

Accompanying this reaction, is the bosses' own reactions, which further answers the question of "why" we run in union elections. The bosses move closer into even more open collusion with the union leadership to prevent us from getting our ideas across to the workers. They threaten us with firing and often carry out that threat, sometimes before the election if they can get away with it without exposing themselves too much, and more often after the election when they feel the heat has died down and support from the workers will be harder to organize on our behalf. During an election they will step up harassment on the job against us, and even more so against any non-Party forces who might be running on the same slate or who are actively supporting us. This creates an issue in itself which can be fought out on the shop floor and through the union, both to spread class struggle and to further expose the collusion between the boss and the incumbent union leadership.

Of course, these are just the smaller, "low-level" steps taken by the bosses to prevent workers from electing communists to union leadership. In a longer-range, strategic sense, the ruling class will never allow PLP'ers to become the leadership of unions, especially in basic industries, as long as they control state power. Therefore, they will engage in an all-out fight to stop us, especially including the use of force, up to and including assassination. The bosses are not about to give up control of a steel or auto local of thousands of workers, much less an industry, without raising the stakes of battle pretty high.

If by some circumstance we were to win an election for leadership in an important industrial local, and the international union couldn't dislodge us through putting the local in trusteeship or somehow taking it over, then the bosses would either move to fire us, frame us, jail us or kill us, which ever would do the job with the least resistance. In short, the ruling class will constantly counter-attack against us, constantly raise the ante, never waiting for us to "take them" in an election. By bringing their state power into the fray, they will

not only be exposing themselves more to the workers; they will also be raising the stakes of battle closer to the fight for state power—which is exactly the result we want to produce.

We shouldn't get trapped into the illusion that "we'll take them in elections." It is power at the point of production—mass class struggle—leading to workers striking to have communists as their leadership plus **winning workers politically**, to move the power at the point of production to political power, that should be foremost in our minds when we engage in union election campaigns. This means simultaneously raising issues like war and fascism, the Nazis/Klan, South Africa, busing, etc.—broader **political** issues than the "momentary" ones in the shop. And **winning politically**, therefore, means recruiting around these

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ideas and out of these struggles, truly the most important goal to win.

Within that context it is important to try to win other, non-Party and non-INCAR forces to run with us, partly to broaden out the base that can be reached with our ideas, and partly to have them go through this whole struggle with us in order to be better able to recruit them. While we will explain our view of union elections as outlined here to them, actually going through the experience will do more than anything else to convince them that the only solution to the treadmill of reform struggle is revolution and joining the Party.

Of course, winning such forces to run with us should not be done in a way that waters down our line, although non-Party forces might not run on a program that would include revolution. We must make

it clear what we stand for, why we're running, and why it's important for them to run with us even if they don't agree with us on everything, as long as they see the need for communists and non-communists to unite based on the need to have communist leadership of workers. There will be constant pressure from honest workers, both those on the slate as well as supporters who want to elect us, to "just take out that revolution stuff," or "don't bring in those 'outside' issues like South Africa. Otherwise, you'll never get elected."

Fine. This is exactly the ideological struggle we want our campaign to produce. We want to use this opportunity to explain to workers that not only are these **not** "outside" issues but that they are essential to the survival of the working class. In fact, we want to then use such a discussion to put forward our whole line on R/R, to explain that it is precisely this world outlook that makes communists so desirable as leaders of workers. This kind of challenge to us should lead into our explaining just how far the bosses will go to prevent us from becoming that leadership, why, and what would happen if we were elected—what we and the workers would have to be prepared for in the way of an all-out fight with the ruling class.

If, of course, we do water down our line or take out this or that "to get more votes" or "to get elected," we will be doing exactly what the CP did as a matter of policy in their era of union leadership. This will leave the workers—and ourselves—wholly unprepared for the inevitable attack that will come from the bosses and the top labor fakers. Furthermore, in many if not most cases, our slate will be the only opposition slate. If we take a strong communist line or militant anti-racist line (as in INCAR), it may be just as likely to win us more votes, quantitatively and especially **qualitatively**, since the difference between us and the sellouts will be sharper, not just seen as the "outs" against the "ins."

In any case, even if the idea that "Left is broad" does not mean that we will win the majority of votes, what we're interested in is winning workers to political ideas and to the Party, to revolution, not to militant reform. To "win" an election around a watered-down line means losing as far as we and the working class are concerned, since that is exactly the position towards which the

ruling class has pushed militant reformers since the class struggle began. We end up working within the system, and useless, as far as real solutions are concerned—building the Party to make a revolution.

All this doesn't mean we don't take the number of votes seriously, but it is **secondary**. Many workers view us as honest and militant and sincerely believe that if we are elected they will get a "better deal." We won't be bought off like the current leaders is what they think. (Of course, their desire to see us elected is what many times leads them to ask that we leave out the "communist stuff" and the "outside" issues.) So we must discuss and struggle with workers for them to understand what will happen if we **do** get elected. Will the bosses allow us (or anyone serving the class interests of the working class) to run the unions without an all-out fight, without their using any or all aspects of their state power to stop it and/or turn it around? Is the question of who runs the union something internal to the union about which the boss is unconcerned and views merely as an "interested bystander"? Or is it something that the boss will attack through firings, layoffs, runaway shops, contracting work out, etc.? Or worse?

(Of course, we can't allow a cynical conclusion from this scenario: "why fight; the boss and his state power are too powerful." We must steer it to the political conclusion of the need for a Party, to follow the Party's leadership, to have the forces to combat racism, the coming fascism and the rise of the anti-working class Nazis/Klan and war, or be left defenseless, without a force, a general staff to direct a counter-attack.)

So if it does turn out that we get fewer votes for a more revolutionary campaign, this is better than getting more votes for a reformist campaign; it is our job to convince the workers of this, of the importance to build a movement that will have the strength to take on the bosses and their junior partners in the leadership. This movement, led by the Party and its communist ideas, will be the real leadership of the workers, whether or not they actually have the "franchise," the titular leadership of the UAW, the USWA, the UMWA, etc.

Furthermore, it is not a question of getting a tiny vote if we run a revolutionary campaign against getting "thou-



500 workers and students, led by the Committee Against Racism, marched in Boston 11/78 against the KKK

sands of votes" in a reform campaign. In some instances, perhaps many, we wind up getting **more** votes with a more Left campaign ("Left is broad") because it distinguishes us more sharply from the sellouts. Even if such a Left campaign doesn't get us more votes, we usually do draw a considerable number if we pursue a vigorous, more revolutionary campaign because we are convincing workers that to vote for these ideas is to vote to build a movement that will be more lasting and ultimately wipe out the enemy, not just win another few crumbs which will be taken away at the bosses' first opportunity. In other words, the amount of votes is not so much dependent on how fearful (or cynical) workers are of voting for communists fighting in a communist way. Rather it is dependent on how well those communists are putting forward a militantly aggressive campaign built around communist ideas that convinces workers such ideas are in their true class interests.

Again, we take a serious view of the amount of votes, not from the point of view of getting elected but from the point of view of **building a movement**, building the Party, building a revolutionary force that has the power to

really deal with the boss. That is how we view votes; that is what we must convince the workers of. In fact, convincing the workers of that view is one of the central features of a communist-run campaign.

If we don't have such an approach to elections, and sometimes even if we do, and we get a fairly sizeable vote, the next trap laid for us is the one that says: "Hell, these sellouts are weak; we did better in our first challenge than any other 'first challengers'; why, the next time around we can 'take them.'" This kind of reaction many times means we are gauging the relationship of forces on: (1) the number of votes; and (2) on the bankruptcy of the current leadership. Well, as we said, they are weak—strategically. But tactically they are ruthless and the bosses will now shift their opposition to us into high gear and aim to **destroy** us. If we let a thing like a good chunk of votes blind us to the reality of what's coming, look out! What follows is either a sound trouncing, a boss counter-attack for which we and the workers are completely unprepared, or the pressure to "just omit that revolution stuff and we'll surely win the next time around" (as if the enemy will sit on its hands for

the next two or three years waiting for us to oust them).

While much of this may sound like a repetition of "truths," when we do get involved in such campaigns, with all the warnings beforehand, we still manage to fall prey to some combination of reformist ideas. We get swept up in a generally positive campaign, in the militance and encouragement from the workers, the exposed sellouts, and either begin to believe our "press clippings," to think "votes" instead of building a movement and recruiting, to possibly drop a few things from the program, or only pay lip-service to them in order to get still more votes—"dammit, maybe we can actually 'win'!"

This doesn't happen because we are "rank opportunists" or because we think the Party has the wrong line. More likely it's because of our training—all of us—under capitalism and the previous reformism in the Party, plus our own anti-communism, our not wanting to struggle it out with the workers about what "winning" is, about the need to build a movement, about what will happen from the bosses' end if we do win, about all the revolutionary ideas we stand for and why it's primarily important to fight for them.

What has actually happened in some of our election campaigns?

In the afore-mentioned transit union election, we ran a very militant, issue-oriented campaign. We flooded the work locations with literature, stickers, sold the paper, etc. We fought in the union around the contract (which we helped get rejected initially). We were immersed in the class struggle night and day. We were offered bribes if we'd just step aside. We were attacked by all the other candidates, who ran essentially the old-style campaign ("vote for me, I smile nicer"). While there were no open party candidates actually running, the INCAR literature did raise the issue of South Africa, the ties of the city's First National Bank both to the transit bonds and to South Africa, etc. We won a number of workers to run with us on the slate. Many others worked hard in the campaign, putting in long hours on the actual election day. Much of this was "to the good."

But, primarily we ran a reform campaign, albeit a militant one. We got swept up into a militant struggle against the sellouts (we did help to defeat the incumbents; another faker eventually won the run-off), rather than into a revolu-

tionary struggle among the workers. Based on coming in 5th out of 10 candidates, and getting over 600 votes for president (10% of the total) and over 1100 votes for another position (with still less of a political campaign), we got to thinking that "we can take them next time; that's what all the workers are telling us."

When it came time for runoff between two hacks, one of them actually sent a courier with a hand-delivered message to the INCAR candidate for president (who they had to search for at a party someplace) on the day before the vote to offer agreement with virtually the entire INCAR program plus the local nomination for the International Secy. -Treas. post in exchange for INCAR supporting this phony. Of course, that endorsement was refused (and the faker who offered it lost), but this guy was never exposed by name, nor was this type of unionism. The party didn't really use this opportunity to show just exactly WHY these guys MUST sell out—because they are pro-capitalist.

All this thinking led to the conclusion by a leading person in the campaign that perhaps another organization, even "broader than INCAR," would be useful to "really win the election next time." If agreed to, this would put the Party and INCAR even further in the background next time. It indicates, again, we're thinking of votes, of getting elected, and "then we'll really put a revolutionary line into practice." An illusion, comrades. All that we said about the reaction of the ruling class and their labor lieutenants is coming; without a strong Party, a strong Left, anti-racist movement among these workers, we'll be driven out.

Although we did win perhaps five workers into INCAR, and have won two others into the Party (not necessarily only out of the election campaign, although it played a role), we could have and should have won 50 workers into INCAR, and half a dozen or more into Party study groups. Our weakness in not doing this, in not really putting forward building the Party, INCAR and a movement around Left politics as **primary**, means that when we want to win workers to battle the Nazis, we win many too few. In the last analysis, **that** becomes the test of what we win in these election campaigns. Who will we mobilize when a war starts, when the Nazis and their ruling class backers launch a drive beyond their current turf, when racist

anti-busing movements give a big push to fascist repression against minority workers?

Had we been able to bring out 40 or 50 transit workers to oppose the Nazis, and they might bring out Hundreds next time, that would have an electrifying effect in the union itself, not just in the effect of an organized group of workers challenging the Nazis and the cops. It would mean we are assuming the **political** leadership of the workers there. **That** is our goal in building a communist-led movement among transit workers, the primary aim of our election campaign there.

All this is not raised to make a case against our transit worker comrades. They are among our best comrades. They pursue their lives among their co-workers with a passion that could very well be emulated by many of us. They are at the center of class struggle at work. They are constantly being attacked by the enemy, a good sign. It is precisely because of all this good work that we raise these weaknesses sharply because the potential for Party leadership in that union is vast. And now the possibility for more open Party work exists there. Certainly the coming period, with the racists and the Nazis seemingly ready to launch fascist and anti-busing forays against black and Latin workers, will have a direct effect on transit workers. It is the overwhelmingly black and Latin bus drivers who will be directly attacked, as some have already been. It is a lot harder to make a case that the Nazis are an "outside" issue when it comes to bus drivers. Even earning \$8 an hour is useless when your skull is crushed. It is up to us to make these **political** points primary in our future work here.

A second campaign we were involved in concerns hospital workers in another city. A very militant, positive campaign was developed, after we had defeated the leadership in state convention delegate elections (causing them to try to expel us from the union, which failed miserably). INCAR ran a very open campaign for union leadership in which "Left" did indeed prove to be "broad." The estimate was it won more votes than if the INCAR program had watered down. It turned out to be the biggest struggle ever at this hospital. It got a state-wide reaction from workers in other locals. Four workers joined a Party fraction and seven joined INCAR. INCAR received over 30% of the vote.

Yet, here also we got taken with the idea that INCAR was about to win the election. It appeared that the enemy wasn't running any kind of campaign at all. They were "invisible." But, even in a trade union sense, we completely underestimated them. Although 1,000 workers work at this hospital, only 250 are in the union. We did not make a mass issue out of organizing hundreds of these non-union workers. And, of course, they weren't eligible to vote in the election. Only half of the 250 members actually voted. Of these the leadership got 80 plus and we got 30 to 40. It really isn't surprising that the leadership, operating "behind the scenes," (although attacking us the day before the election by saying we were "Nazis" and that one white candidate was leading a bunch of black slate members around by the nose), it isn't surprising that they might have 80 supporters out of a thousand (and probably even some of these votes were based on nationalism and anti-communism, not necessarily being confirmed members of the sellouts' machine).

The need—and realistic potential—of winning scores of workers into INCAR and a goodly number into a Party fraction competed with the feeling that these sellout fakers were weak and we were about to "take them." If organizing a movement was foremost in our minds, we wouldn't have been thinking about "winning" in trade union terms. If by some strange circumstance we had won under those terms, look out for the vicious counter-attack by the bosses and Wurf. (This is an AFSCME local.) Would the workers have been prepared for such an attack, especially since 75% are **not** in the union? It's doubtful, unless 30 or 40 had become members of INCAR and were following the Party's leadership. Then we might have witnessed a much sharper battle against such a counter-attack, **which would have won still more workers to the Party and INCAR, and would have produced more workers to challenge the Nazis in that city.**

The estimate is that the base for the Party is enormous here—probably 100 papers could be sold every issue here, while 30 are now (and the sale fell during the campaign). The Party and INCAR leading hundreds of workers into joining the union under Left leadership could make for really sharper class struggle here, under our leadership, and would tie the reform struggle to revolution in no uncertain terms. Based on our past work,

we certainly have the goods to deliver. While we should be careful not to make too sweeping a generalization just from a few campaigns, certainly their lessons are not far off the mark from what many party members might have experienced had they been conducting such campaigns. The overwhelmingly positive side of those campaigns that have been undertaken is just that—that a concerted effort was made to carry out the line on running PLP/INCAR slates in the unions on a Left/revolutionary line. If that hadn't been attempted, none of the above lessons, both positive and negative, would exist to learn from. In that sense, these early attempts at carrying out a Left/revolutionary line in union elections blaze a trail for others to follow, trying to avoid any reformist pitfalls that existed in these early ones.

... with racists and Nazis seemingly ready to launch fascist forays, it is harder to make a case that the Nazis are an 'outside' issue ... Even earning 8—an hour is useless when your skull is crushed

Given all this, we should start election campaigns and organize class struggle NOW, not wait a year or more "until the nominations meeting." We can begin to organize slates, draw up programs, and initiate class struggle, around the Party's line—anti-racism, South Africa, 30-for-40/anti-racism/surplus value, war, fascism and the Nazis/Klan, etc. Our campaigns should begin well ahead of time, not just last the two months of nominations and elections. Out of this struggle we should be able to recruit, which can be more enduring recruitment than mere "intellectual agreement" with the line and then struggling later inside the Party to carry out class struggle. While we should by no means stop this "miscellaneous" recruiting of people who we win to the Party outside our base of operations in the shop and union,

recruits won out or class struggle where we work may very well be more likely to carry out the line once inside the Party. The more recent recruits seem to be more of that character.

A note about non-Party/INCAR forces on a slate: certainly efforts should be made to win workers who are not members of the Party or of INCAR to run with us on these slates. At the same time it should be made clear to them what program we're running on and WHY. The attempt to do that is part of the effort of winning these very prospective candidates to the Party's line on R/R. In fact, the result of winning such a worker to run with us should, at least, be his or her joining INCAR, if not a Party fraction. If we see such a worker running mainly to win the most votes to get elected, and therefore arguing for watering down our line, we shouldn't just let it happen; we should make a big political struggle to win that worker away from such an outlook. That's a key aspect of our "winning."

When we total up the gains and victories from such a campaign, it should note not merely the number of workers won to INCAR and the Party, but the kind of political struggle, over what ideas and class action taken, led to these workers being won. When we write an article for Challenge-Desafio it shouldn't merely say "three people joined a fraction" and "10 people joined INCAR." It should explain what those people represent, what kind of struggle influenced them to join, how did they come to realize the primacy of revolution/building-a-movement over militant reform struggle, without excluding the latter. And even if we didn't win anyone organizationally, we should still explain the nature of the political and class struggle, so others can learn from that and do better.

For instance, right now a campaign is being launched in Chicago-Gary to win workers in the shops and unions to build a movement to smash the Nazis. This means:

- launching political struggle in the work-place;
- raising anti-Nazi resolutions at union meetings;
- circulating petitions on the shop floor calling for special union meetings to deal with the question;
- getting backing for the Susana Findley case;
- dealing with every question workers

raise in these discussions, putting out leaflets summarizing those discussions, and linking various actions of class struggle to the need to smash the Nazis;

- pointing out to workers that if this fascist movement is allowed to grow, there will be no such thing as union grievances, contract struggles, union elections, etc.; there will only be fascism, and a fight from a far different vantage point. This effort to politicize these workers will not only result in their joining to smash the Nazis; it will also make them the **political leaders of the union and the shop**, which is what we aspire to now, but which does not exist if we cannot bring workers to anti-Nazi actions and similar fights.

Winning people to the Party and INCAR in such a struggle is not winning them merely because they see us as "fighting organizations" that refuse to sell out or even because they like the line in **Challenge-Desafio**. It should be because they not only understand the relation between the growth of fascism and the more intensified oppression of the working class, but also because they see the role of the working class—especially from the point of production—as the key force in fighting fascism and because they themselves have participated in that fight under the leadership of the Party. That kind of winning should be sought and explained when it happens (and if it doesn't happen, that too should be explained).

III. Contract Struggles and Strikes

Just as in union elections, the tendency to avoid leading or organizing contract struggles and strikes (as "reformist") or to get swept up in their reform character is also prevalent. To shy away from being in the center of such struggles is not only to leave the field clear for both the sellouts and the opportunists (and thereby help feed the cynicism and hopelessness of workers). It also means we could absent ourselves from the more militant forms of class struggle under capitalism and give up the aim of giving such actions a political character. And we cannot do the latter unless we are fully involved in them. The "trick" is to avoid involvement limited to the reform nature of these struggles and appearing as the "most militant reformers." Again, we immerse ourselves in such struggles, and lead them, in order to move the workers involved in a revo-

lutionary direction.

For instance, if we know a contract is coming up within a year, we should try to assess the boss's status within the general decline of the system, figure out how the company plans to take out capitalism's squeeze on this particular group of workers, and plan a program that links those aspects. Of course, we should try to involve other workers in this effort, preferably in a Party fraction or in a INCAR chapter. If we make a sincere effort in organizing either, or both, and aren't successful, we shouldn't just give up. We should at least take the most Left workers we've been trying to influence and organize a committee to fight for a decent contract with the **main aim** of winning the more advanced workers in such a group to the Party and/or INCAR. We should **not** do it with the main aim of fighting "some kind of" reform struggle, although that may very well result from our efforts.

Into this contract struggle we should bring the Party's line. We should try to pick out the specific aspects of our line that relate to this particular fight. Most certainly this includes the fight against racism, racist layoffs, racist harassment etc. Many can be linked to the fight against apartheid in South Africa. Many have international implications. Certainly 30 for 40 and the uniting of the working class around such a fight is possible in virtually all such contract struggles. The question of the fight between U.S. and Soviet bosses, and the consequent squeeze on U.S. workers—as an explanation for the U.S. ruling class's drive to take away previous gains—has meaning for more and more of these struggles. The pressure to limit wage increases to a point way below inflation rates, and to cut wages, is not some isolated phenomenon; it comes directly out of the sagging position in which the U.S. ruling class finds itself. Of course, it's true that the bosses will always try to limit workers as much as they can get away with; but the pressure to do so in a **declining** system is much greater than in an **ascending** one.

Within all this, therefore, the drive towards war, and the racism/fascism needed to carry out a war, may very well be the most pertinent issue of all. So when we "plan for a contract," all these political issues are in the hopper. We, as Party members, must figure out many of these links and how to raise them within the context of a contract struggle.



Auto workers are key for the fight for socialism, (May Day march in Detroit)

This means: a series of leaflets and shop papers distributed at plant gates and inside; articles in **Challenge-Desafio** that are sold to the workers and help set up a network of sellers inside (again, the role of the paper is vital, since it discusses all these issues in virtually every paper); resolutions brought to union meetings linking the political issues to the contract; petitions circulated on the shop floor in advance of these union meetings as a way to involve the workers who don't come to these meetings and to encourage more of them to come to support the resolutions; lunch-hour meetings in our departments to raise these issues; and, as the contract expiration gets closer, stoppages, walk-outs, etc., where the strength exists.

It means that winning workers in the organization of this struggle to Party/INCAR actions **outside the workplace** is doubly important. That is, giving them a broader outlook on capitalism, on the relation of the contract squeeze to the rise of the Nazis/Klan, to the increase in racism in the form of anti-busing movements, to the dangers of the need to oppose apartheid, etc.—the under-

standing gained from participating in all these things the Party and INCAR organizers will help make these workers **political** leaders in the contract struggle and win them to the Left and to the Party.

It is not a question of "you can't do two things at once"; it is a question of **broadening out the political understanding of workers by linking capitalism's contradictions outside the workplace to those at the point of production.** The contract fight often offers a unique opportunity to do this because this is the reform struggle that workers may very well be most concerned about and on which they will fight the hardest. And all the pressure to "drop those outside issues" to win the fight "at hand" are as great here as anyplace else. It means we should know the history of contract struggles at our plant and in the industry, the better able to point out the treadmill nature of reform struggles. Certainly the miners' strike proved, in spades, that the most militant reform struggle is not enough to hold onto the most hard-fought gains, such as medical and pension plans.

The strike is an extension of the contract fight, since it should be the aim of every such fight to carry it to its most **antagonistic** conclusion as far as the boss is concerned, and to its most **unifying** conclusion as far as the workers are concerned, especially in situations involving minority and white workers. That is what a strike represents, since it cuts off the flow of profits for the boss, or the flow of vital services on which much of the rest of capitalism may depend, and at the same time it puts workers in a position where unity—fighting against racism, nationalism, disunity of men and women, jingoism against undocumented workers—can become the make-or-break factor.

Furthermore, once workers are out on the street (or, even more militantly, occupying a work-place), the opportunity to give the strike a **political** character is far greater. As this is written (August 1978) some postal workers are wild-cattling. What happens in such a strike if it becomes broader, as in any national walkout of government workers, especially in vital services? In the first postal strike, troops were called out. Based on **political** organizing, can workers be won to oppose those troops? Even further, based on political organizing in **the army**, can troops be won **not** to fight workers? And what would that mean to the Party's standing among a particular group of striking workers if we could show how communist organizing among soldiers is inextricably woven into their fight against their own boss?

Strikes in virtually any industry that last beyond a few days usually meet some form of ruling class **state** opposition—cops, court injunctions, limitation of picketing, government “mediation” and arbitration, etc. Again, this offers excellent opportunities to show the relation of the boss to the state apparatus, of the state as the weapon of a class, and what that means about the need to smash the bosses' state and erect a workers' state. This should be among our **primary** objectives in organizing and participating in strikes. Winning a worker to the party out of this kind of understanding is revolutionary. Winning one to the party based on our functioning the “most militantly” in a strike might set the worker up for future revolutionary struggle once inside the party, but it is far more reformist, weaker, and probably will lead to the worker leaving the party a lot more easily than one recruited on revo-

lutionary understanding. That is our experience.

Also, strikes many times lead from the work-place to other capitalist institutions—government buildings, the media, blocking vital transportation, etc. Interestingly enough, when the N.Y.C. cops recently didn't like something the N.Y. **Daily News** printed about their demands (and cops are not workers), they stopped **News** trucks from moving for an hour. While we understand the role of cops, and would never support them in protecting their capitalism bosses, what if we won a group of striking **workers** to shut down a newspaper or TV station that was spreading lies about these workers? That certainly would be a highly political act, and is the kind of thing possible in a strike if we are thinking revolution, not reform.

One example of trying to conduct a strike in more political, revolutionary terms rather than in the old reform way was the Kansas City school strike. Not only were we militant in the actual organization of the strike but, most important, we looked for the political links in the strike to the rest of the system. Therefore, we raised the role of the state in trying to break the strike as a paramount issue; we exposed the union misleaders as bowing to the bosses' state; we made this issue the subject of a **Challenge-Desafio** editorial and sold hundreds to the strikers, causing them to use the editorial's arguments in challenging their union “leaders.” Furthermore, we were able to use the Party's political line to challenge the racism of the school system, and the nationalism used to split the workers through the hiring of a black school superintendent and through using Jesse Jackson to divide the minority parents and students from the teachers (both white and minority).

Because we did a lot more in this strike to push the Party's line, through paper sales and stories, regular Party leaflets and bulletins about the political issues of the strike, seizing the floor at union strike meetings and warning about the bosses' use of the state apparatus, and the need for a workers' state, constantly fighting against the racism spread by the bosses to split the strike, etc., and because we tried to keep paramount in our minds the need to win strikers to the Left, we were able to form a Party fraction of five out of the strike. It has continued in one form or another right



Anti-racist march led by C.A.R. in Willimantic, Conn.

up to the present, more than a year later, and led us to a wider base of potential recruits all over Kansas City.

While we made many mistakes in this effort, it being one of the first strikes in which we tried to carry out the line of R/R, it certainly proved that the gains to be made for the Party in making revolution, not reform, the main aspect are most valid. The mere attempt itself solidified the Party **politically** in K.C., and made it more confident that it could repeat these efforts elsewhere. It won great respect from scores of workers. Following a revolutionary line on the state helped us to predict the enemy's moves correctly, leading many strikers to follow us, or at least see us as a serious force.

Just as we follow a revolutionary, political line in contract struggles, aiming to build the Party, not to concentrate on the reform aspect, so, too, must we follow this line during strikes themselves. These high points of class struggle can lead to recruits, to winning workers to smash the Nazis, to developing a working-class base against war and fascism, if we but lead them in that direction. Thus, in the heat of a strike struggle, when the union flunkies pose

the question of going back now "because the boss can't afford any more and we'll only hurt ourselves if we stay out longer," our reply must not be simply "the boss can afford more, he's making money hand over fist, so let's stay out longer." Especially if there is little rank-and-file strike organization, most workers will not see that as a realistic alternative.

No, our answer must concentrate on exposing the nature of the system and the use of its state and its ideology (racism, etc.) to explain why workers are put into such a situation in the first place. We must be prepared to counter this ruling **class** and its state and ideology if we are to stay out and try to beat them—which means getting support from many more workers and winning **them** to oppose this ruling **class**. All this helps explain why these union "leaders" are so ready to sell out: they make their living from defending the system, being pro-capitalist, and playing the role of keeping the struggle **within** the system's ground rules. Therefore, they **MUST** sell out.

Of course, our answer can't be limited to such a speech, although it's not bad for openers. But we should be ready to

carry out action, and should have been preparing for such action before-hand (during the prestrike contract struggle) by having been winning workers to the Left, to a fraction or INCAR chapter so that there will be others ready to support this line and to carry it out. (This would also present a realistic alternative behind a line of "staying out" and escalating the struggle.) So, again, winning workers to a revolutionary outlook is the vital question, not winning this or that reform fight. But, without participating in this or that reform fight, we will have little relation to workers who we would be trying to win.

IV. Organizing a union.

This is an area where we probably have had the least experience, and which may offer the greatest danger of falling into a reformist trap because we are initiating an organization—a trade union—which, by definition, is a reform organization under capitalism.

If we work in a place that doesn't have a union, one of our first aims should be to see one organized, not because of the reforms that such a union could institute (although that might happen, for a while), but because it can bring the workers and us into a sharp fight with the boss and the state, and impel the unity needed against all the bosses' splitting ideas—racism, nationalism, oppression of women, etc. Through that kind of fight, again, we can recruit to the Left and to the Party, if we have that paramount in our minds.

This is not to say that we're "not interested" in winning a union and the possible immediate gains that could come with it. But the fact is we do know that there are great pitfalls in pursuing that goal, which lead away from it. For instance, in organizing a union, there are usually two choices, given a certain amount of initial gathering together (usually secretly at first, than in a mass way) of an organizing group committed to winning a union: should we organize an independent union (which could also be an "INCAR union" or even a "Red" union—to be discussed at the convention) or should we affiliate to some already existing AFL-CIO union?

If we try to affiliate, because workers will think we need the "backing," "prestige" and "strength" of an established union, we run the risk—a sure thing—of

being sold out, having our militancy dampened, and being subject to all the pro-capitalist ideology of these union fakers. On the other hand, if we decide against that and in favor of independence, we may very well face the full onslaught of the local ruling class, not interested in seeing unionism spread, especially independent unionism under the leadership of communists, no less. Will we have the strength to withstand that kind of counter-attack? And what about challenging the AFL-CIO union hacks who inevitably will be brought in (with the collusion of the boss if he concludes he can't avoid a union), to assume the leadership of our effort? If we are not in a position to organize rank-and-file backing from other workers, we will have virtually no allies. A tough situation, at best.

These problems are not raised to make us feel hopelessly caught between "the devil and the deep blue sea." Rather, they are raised to demonstrate once again that the main thing to be won out of a unionizing effort is moving workers to the Left and to the Party, to demonstrate once again the rottenness of the system and the need to overthrow it. That is, whatever we decide to do—and this includes whatever the Convention comes up with in the way of a policy on union organizing—one way or another the ruling class will come down on us and very possibly succeed in crushing the union, even if it wins initially. That is, the bosses will move heaven and earth to turn it around, as it did to the left-led CIO. So, unless we win some workers to the Party, we really will have won very little.

Right now the union leaderships are so corrupt that it appears to be a dead loser to affiliate. (However, we might be powerless to stop it, and then we'd have to function like any party member in a Right-led union.) Yet, we'll probably experience a titanic fight to lead an independent union, especially as communists. Look at the ruling class/cop effort to keep the Party out of the Los Angeles garment center. But that's just the point: organizing a union leads to all the contradictions of capitalism coming together in one fight, all the capitalist ideology being brought to bear to defeat it, all the needs of the workers pitted against all the needs of the bosses. It makes for a particularly sharp fight and opportunity to raise our analysis of the system, its links to all the "outside"

(continued on page 30)