

# HRUM- The Error of Dual Unionism

by Pat Rodriguez

The New York City hospital system has been in crisis for over 20 years. There were more hospitals in relation to the amount of people, but there was a shortage of doctors, nurses and non-professional staff. At the same time, the medical schools found themselves in trouble. They were short of teaching material, patients with different types of diseases to show the interns.

From this situation evolved the 'Affiliation Contracts' which gave private hospitals a city hospital to manage. In turn they got patients for their interns and access to funds and staff. Profits for the medical schools increased rapidly, but working conditions got worst. The working class communities were growing and the city hospitals remained the same. This caused overcrowding and more problems for the already overworked, underpaid non-professional staff. The private hospitals (Mt. Sinai, Beth Israel, Albert Einstein College) were building modern buildings and expanding their empires, buying the buildings in our communities and stocks into the drug industry. The Unions:

The workers in the city hospitals belonged to District Council 37. This union handles all city agencies and hospitals. With a membership of approximately 110,000 workers, it is the largest union, next to the United Federation of Teachers.

The workers in the private hospitals belonged to Local 1199 of the Drug and Hospitals Union. This union had waged a long struggle around wages and benefits for their membership. So the situation arose where in one hospital you would have some departments or workers covered by the city union and others by Local 1199. We would find

workers doing the same job getting different salaries. This served to cause divisions and antagonisms among us.

At about this time the grouping of rank and file workers began to change from white, blue collar workers to black and Puerto Rican workers. The union leadership did not change, it remained white middle class. The level of social and political awareness of the workers was developing rapidly. This was due to the existing conditions throughout the country and the birth of the 'civil rights movement.' Workers began to rise up around social and political issues such as decent health care, better working conditions and racism on the job. The union leadership would not support the workers because they claimed that these were not 'union issues'.

Health Revolutionary  
Unity Movement  
(H.R.U.M.)

We saw the need to establish an organization of workers to unite and fight for more than 'bread and butter' issues. We wanted to determine priorities of health care and call for unity between workers and patients to unmask the inadequate money making industry of Health so we formed H.R.U.M.

We started trying to recruit the more advanced union members into H.R.U.M. We now recognize this as our first mistake. As a reaction to the union leadership we failed to see the needs of the rank and file. We were setting up dual unionism by creating another organization when one already existed that the masses of workers related to. We were one sided and did not recognize the fact that unions are the only recognized bargaining agents for the workers. We also see that it is the

responsibility of all workers to intergrate ourselves into our union, and raise the issues that most affect us.

As a revolutionary organization we held rallies to protest indecent healthcare, racism and poor working conditions. We expected workers to support us in this way, not taking into account that workers had families and other responsibilities and could not risk their jobs so recklessly as we did. We received a lot of grievances but we couldn't resolve them because we weren't the recognized representation of the workers. Even though we served to raise consciousness in many ways, we did not see the need to organize within our union, form caucuses and plan long range goals.

Until recently we functioned in this way. Then came the 'rollback' of 1199 members in the city hospitals. There was a big power play between the two union leaderships and the 1199 workers were transferred to DC 37. Vacation pay, pay increases and seniority rights were up in the air. For months we didn't know who would represent us. At this point we saw that workers needed and wanted a union. We then involved ourselves directly at our workplaces with our co-workers and demanded our right. We were able to get a meeting first with 1199, they informed us that 'their hands were tied'. From there we contacted DC 37, and got ourselves informed about our coverage and benefits. Our next step is to have elections of shop stewards that will represent our interests. From within we will continue to raise the issues that came up with the 'rollbacks'.

We will struggle to build 'Rank and File' leadership for our unions. We will struggle against our old dual unionist ideas that only served to weaken the already established unions. The workers have fought hard to build.