

international socialists newsletter

February 3, 1978

Essex Conference

The Essex Conference will take place this weekend (Feb.4). The Conference was called by the Essex Strikers to plan ways to continue their fight.

Its not clear how many people will be at the conference or exactly what is likely to come out of it.

We will be proposing a strategy to continue the fight that was begun at Essex and bring it into the rest of the parts supply industry. Because what happened at Essex can easily happen to workers in the rest of the industry.

The first priority is to rebuild the Essex Local at Elwood. Some of the court fines on members for picketing haven't been paid yet although the UAW leadership promised to pay them. The union people at Elwood are already policing the call-back list to insure that members are called back in order of seniority.

Part of rebuilding the local is raising money for Carol Frye, the woman who was seriously wounded by company guards during the strike and is still partially paralised. The UAW leadership has reneged on their promises of financial help and now she is not even getting her health insurance money. Obviously no one is going to think much of a local that doesn't manage to get help for her.

We are proposing that UAW members from other locals raise money for her in their locals. This will not only give the Elwood people much needed help but allow people to explain what happened at Essex.

The second part of our strategy is preparing a serious fight against the Essex company as a whole. Since only 72 out of the 115 plants in the Essex system are organized and only 9 of them by the UAW the place to start is forcing the UAW to start a serious organizing drive.

The best place to begin that fight will be at the UAW Independents, Parts and Suppliers Annual Conference which is scheduled for March in Indianapolis. The Elwood Essex Local could take the lead at this conference in fighting for a resolution demanding that the UAW leadership commit organizers and money to organizing Essex and other substandard shops. Because of the tremendous

for IS and RT members only

build up the International gave the Essex strikers the Elwood local would have a great deal of credability at that conference.

We are also proposing trying to get a council set up of all the Essex locals in the UAW to co-ordinate bargaining. We think this Essex Council should have developing an Essex coalition of all unions representing Essex workers as one of its priorities. The IAM, IBT, IUE, USW, and Allied Industrial Workers all have Essex contracts.

We still don't know what will happen at the conference this weekend. Even if our proposals aren't accepted it will be a chance for us to get to know UAW people from outside of Detroit we might not meet otherwise.

Anti-Nazi Demonstration

The Detroit IS and Red Tide had taken the initiative in planning a march against the local Nazi bookstore-headquarters last Saturday (Jan. 29). Unfortunately a blizzard hit the Mid West and we have had to postpone the march for two weeks until Feb. 12.

Until now every left group has organized its own demonstration against the Nazis. The result has been a series of small demonstrations.

We are trying to organize a united effort to build the biggest demonstration possible. We are trying to go beyond the left and involve labor and community groups as well.

We have been able to get a fairly good list of endorsers including Pete Kelly of the Independent Skilled Trades Council, Dave Mc Cullough VP UAW Local 869, John Anderson former President Local 15 UAW, Latin Americans at Great Lakes Steel, Irish American Club, National Lawyers Guild, Youth Against War and Facism, and the Revolutionary Socialist League. Incidentally the SWP first endorsed and then withdrew its endorsement.

We're hoping to make this the biggest anti-Nazi demonstration in Detroit so far.

Trade Union Commission

We have set up a Trade Union Commission composed of KimM (convenor) Gay S (National Secretary, and the full timers in charge of auto, steel and Teamsters.

Its general task is to oversee our industrial work and to be the active link between the Fraction leaders and the EC. The commission meets weekly.

It should not become just a traveling service agency. Nor should it become just a few more heads in figuring day to day tactical questions.

Rather it has a role to play that the fraction leaders often find it difficult to play because of the enormous demands of the day to day work; that is, figuring out the big picture for US industry as a whole and for each of the industries we work in.

The crisis in each of these industries and the shakey state of the economy as a whole mean changes - hotter employers offensive, various moves by employers and union chiefs to stymie the reform movement, growth of union busting, etc.

Additionally 1978 will be a tough election year with the ultra right making big bids for Congress and labor on the political defensive - probably more emphasis on electing Democrats than ever before.

In brief many of the assumptions we have worked on in the past may not hold. We need to help the fractions figure this out.

But there is even more to it than that. There is an enormous opportunity for us. Above and beyond our penetration of union life in any one union or reform milieu, there lies the task of becoming part of a national cross-union network of reformers and left-of-center types. Some of these people apparently meet from time to time and stay in touch.

We need to be a part of this milieu. And we can bring something to this milieu that few others can. A clear analysis of what's going on in industry and the unions - i.e. the Big Picture.

Postal Contract Coalition

The Postal Contract Coalition is picking up steam. We've recently received endorsements from the General President of the American Postal Workers Union (APWU) local in Suburban Ill. and the Executive Vice President of the Richmond CA APWU local.

People from Oakland, Chicago, Pittsburgh, Washington DC, Seattle and New York have already agreed to come to the Coalition's founding meeting in Chicago Feb. 18-20.

TDU

Following the election defeat in Detroit TDU has continued to build.

You can read about the election victory in Green Bay in this issue of WP.

Since the Detroit election TDU has picked up new activists in Oklahoma, Iowa, and Ohio. They expect to be running election campaigns soon in two important Pittsburgh locals.

We still have excellent reasons for expecting Fitzsimons to resign. The new government suit to force him to personally repay the money misappropriated from the Central States Pension Fund will intensify the pressure for resignation.

When Fitz goes there will have to be a Special Convention to choose a new president.

TDU will definitely have some delegates at that convention. The Green Bay and Vancouver people will automatically be delegates. In some of the larger locals which actually get to elect some of their delegates TDU is hoping to get a few more delegates.

TDU will probably run a candidate for President. By running

a candidate they will be entitled to space in the International Teamster (the official union magazine which is sent to every member of the union) and may even be able to force the union to mail TDU literature to all the members. Obviously this would be a tremendous opportunity for building TDU.

A continuing problem for the Teamster rank and file movement is the division between TDU and PROD. At present PROD claims to have 5,000 members. They are extremely well financed and have seven full time staff people.

PROD has ready access to the Eastern establishment press. They are frequently quoted on TV and radio. They leaked the story on the new pension fund suit to the TV networks and got good publicity out of it.

All this creates a problem TDU will have to deal with.