

In Defense of Marxism

\$3.00

AFL-CIO Calls National March on Detroit While —

— Across Detroit River —

— Canadian Unions Plan Windsor, Ontario, Days of Action

All Out for Detroit & Windsor — June 13-14! International Labor Protest!!

**Why Every Working Person
Should Be There — Appeal
by Detroit Striker Barbara
Ingalls and Articles by
Richard Scully and Barry
Weisleder**

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Labor Party Strategies and Discussion
Rita Shaw and Brian King on the Right
Mix for Unions and Chapters
Frank Lovell on Problems of Building the
Labor Party
Paul Le Blanc on Building the Labor Party
in Pittsburgh
Bill Onasch on Where the Labor Party
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George Saunders and Ben Stone Debate
"Critical Support"

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From the Managing Editors

The focus of this issue is on building the Detroit march and on questions facing the Labor Party, and the labor movement globally (including the problem of corrupt labor bureaucracies, as in Mexico, Malaysia, and our own country.) We are especially pleased to have Richard Scully's account of events around the Detroit strike. And we urge readers to respond to the plea by Detroit striker Barbara Ingalls — "Come to Detroit June 13-14!"

Global workers solidarity — global unionism as the answer to global capitalism — was recently exemplified by an international shutdown on January 20 in support of the striking Liverpool dockworkers. (See Kim Moody's "From Liverpool to L.A." in the March *Labor Notes*, which quotes a newspaper headline on the effects of the action: "Pacific rim trade sputtered to a halt.") This issue of *BIDOM* reports on solidarity actions by U.S. and other unions with working people under attack in Korea, Indonesia, and elsewhere.

Discussions of Labor in the U.S. Press

Discussion of the labor movement generally, and of the Labor Party in particular, continues in the small-circulation press. For example, the February issue of *Z* magazine has an excellent interview with Tony Mazzocchi "On the Birth of the Labor Party." Readers may be interested to look at "Does the U.S. Labor Movement Have a Future?" by Michael D. Yates in the February *Monthly Review*. Yates looks at changes in the AFL-CIO, and takes up the Labor Party as well.

Jane Slaughter had two interesting articles on the Labor Party — in *Labor Notes* (December 1996) and *New Politics* (winter 1997). We don't agree with the emphasis in her *Labor Notes* article, "The Labor Party Should Run Candidates," which suggests that immediate preparations for running candidates are essential for the Labor Party's success. In this issue of our magazine Frank Lovell and Bill Onasch offer a different view.

In her *New Politics* article, Jane Slaughter is somewhat disdainful of the Labor Party leadership's present approach, which she calls "the holding tank strategy." She suggests that there are no immediate prospects for adding more unions to the LP "holding tank."

But facts belie her pessimism on this score. In September the GCIU convention passed a resolution "recognizing" the Labor Party, with mass support from the delegates. An interview with GCIU member Chris Farrand (of the Cleveland Labor Party chapter) in the January 1997 *Labor Party Press* describes what happened.

There are strong pro-labor party currents in other unions, especially the Teamsters. We shouldn't forget that Ron Carey was the only one on the AFL-CIO Executive Council, aside from LP leader and ILWU head Brian McWilliams,

who refused to vote for AFL-CIO endorsement of Clinton last spring. Carey has told some that he thinks a labor party is a good idea, but that it should have a broader name, a suggestion Jane Slaughter herself makes in her *New Politics* article. How this will all play out remains to be seen.

One thing we can be sure of: the Clinton administration will be taking anti-labor actions, whether in attacking the "social contract," as Bill Onasch puts it, or by intervening against strikers (as with the American Airlines pilots, as discussed by David Jones) or in some other area. Just as NAFTA and the breaking of rail strikes drove many unionists to the labor party idea in the past five years, the "bosses are going to be the best organizers" for the labor party. Their representative, Clinton, will do things that will convince more unionists that we need a party of our own.

The nascent Labor Party is not a "holding tank"; it is the beginning of a political fightback formation that is "in training"; it needs to be kept alive and nourished and strengthened as much as possible until a new spurt of growth comes to it out of the social process of class struggle, the employers' "one-sided class war" against working people. You can be sure the bosses aren't going to call off the war, especially when they're profiting so handsomely from it. We can be confident more unions will join the fightback army forming around the Labor Party.

The discussion on Labor Party strategy and tactics will continue. We understand that Jane Slaughter has been invited to speak on a panel at the upcoming Socialist Scholars Conference (March 28-30 at Manhattan Borough Community College in New York City). The topic will be "What Next for the Labor Party?"; Bob Wages has agreed to be on the panel; also, Ed Bruno, the New England LP organizer is being invited.

Also at the Socialist Scholars Conference, Humanities Press will be sponsoring a session on "Writing the History of 'American Trotskyism': Two Views." Speakers will include *BIDOM* editor Paul Le Blanc and historian Alan Wald. They, together with the late George Breitman, were editors of the 1996 book *Trotskyism in the United States*, which was reviewed and discussed by our contributor Joe Auciello in the November-December *BIDOM*.

It is likely that Tamiment Labor Library at New York University will be hosting a special reception, in conjunction with the Trotskyism panel, featuring photograph and manuscript displays, along with "historic Trotskyists" present as guests.

Many of our readers will undoubtedly wish to attend these Socialist Scholars Conference events. We expect to carry reports on them and have more discussion on all these questions in future issues.

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Big Breakthrough for Locked-Out Newspaper Workers:

AFL-CIO Endorses Call for National March in Detroit

by Richard Scully

In an extraordinary victory for rank-and-file newspaper workers on strike for 20 months at the *Detroit Free Press* and *Detroit News*, the leadership of the AFL-CIO has endorsed a call for a national mobilization in Detroit on Friday and Saturday, June 13-14, 1997. The action was taken at the meeting of the federation's Executive Council, held in Los Angeles February 17-20.

For the past year and a half, militant and activist strikers and supporters have called for the entire labor movement to mobilize to win this critical struggle. While never counterposing their strike to any other, the Detroit strikers have long maintained that the labor movement's stake in this struggle required the kind of national solidarity mobilization that now has been called. In the Appeal for this action, signed by over 900 strikers, and endorsed by their local unions and by the Metro Detroit and Michigan State AFL-CIOs, the strikers said:

We believe we must act now because the future of the labor movement as a whole will be critically affected by the outcome of this strike. After all, if corporations like Gannett and Knight-Ridder can break unions in a labor stronghold like Detroit, what union anywhere is safe from similar union-busting? [See the previous issue of *BIDOM*, January-February 1997, for the full text of the strikers' Appeal.]

Failure of Previous Efforts

In the early months of the strike, when the call for a national mobilization was first promulgated, it largely fell on deaf ears. Top officers of the six striking locals in Detroit, working closely with the AFL-CIO nationally, were confident that a combination advertising and subscription boycott would suffice to win the strike. Indeed, in a March 10, 1996, interview with the strikers' newspaper, the *Sunday Journal*, AFL-CIO Secretary-Treasurer Richard Trumka, when asked if the Detroit newspaper strike was winnable, responded:

"Absolutely. As recalcitrant and as blind as the newspapers are, the shareholders are not going to let them sustain the losses they are sustaining now for much longer. They can't produce a newspaper profitably in this area without us."

Trumka's upbeat assessment was echoed by the presidents of the six striking locals. They saw no need for a national march when the advertising and circulation boycott was, in their view, so effective.

So the months went by. But Gannett and Knight-Ridder, corporate owners of the *News* and *Free Press* respectively, still did not budge at the bargaining table. In the face of this, the rank-and-file call for a national labor mobilization continued to be voiced.

By the summer of 1996, the Action Coalition of Strikers and Supporters (ACOSS) had formed as the successor to the earlier Labor-Community-Religious Coalition in Support of the Striking Newspaper Workers. ACOSS's program, like its predecessor's, called for a national labor march on Detroit.

ACOSS decided to focus on the AFL-CIO's Executive Council meeting in Chicago in August 1996. The Metro Detroit AFL-CIO, on the initiative of a large United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) local in Detroit, adopted a resolution for a national labor march. The resolution was then forwarded to AFL-CIO President John Sweeney. ACOSS organized phone calls and faxes to Executive Council

members, urging them to approve and organize the march. But the Council declined to do so.

In November 1996, ACOSS launched a new effort with the Appeal. But this time it decided to organize a 3-month national campaign at the grass roots to build support for its proposed national march.

Leaders of the six striking locals could no longer credibly defend the strategy of relying exclusively on an advertising and circulation boycott to win the strike. They endorsed the Appeal, as did the Metro Detroit AFL-CIO, the Michigan State AFL-CIO, UAW Region 1A, and Teamsters Joint Council 43.

Meanwhile the strike had taken a heavy toll on the strikers. Hundreds had been forced to find other employment and were no longer active in the strike. Three hundred workers had been fired for alleged picket line misconduct. Hundreds more had crossed the line, especially in the early days of the strike.

International Days of Solidarity

AFL-CIO Leaders Call for National Mobilization in Detroit in June

The following letter was addressed to presidents of all state federations, central labor councils, and union locals in the AFL-CIO.

February 20, 1997

Dear President:

For a year and a half you have supported the 2,000 newspaper workers who have been battling the corporate owners of the *Detroit Free Press* and *Detroit News* in an effort to win a just contract. The 19-month strike recently entered a new phase when the six striking locals initiated an effort to take back the plant, and set up the contract campaign both in Detroit and throughout the companies' corporate empires. This campaign will include Action! Motown '97, the two-day mobilization of supporters nationwide for actions and rallies on June 13-14, 1997, in Detroit.

Action! Motown '97 will help focus attention on anti-union *USA Today* parent Gannett Corporation, which has already sunk more than \$250 million in an effort to bust the locals of the Teamsters, Communications Workers of America, and the Graphic Communications International Union.

Action! Motown '97 will take place at the same time as the Canadian Days of Action across the Detroit River in Windsor, Ontario, an effort designed to call attention to anti-labor policies by Ontario's provincial government. The American and Canadian campaigns will make this an international event of solidarity.

On February 19, 1997, the AFL-CIO Executive Council adopted a resolution pledging support to the Detroit workers' ongoing campaign. Please help make Action! Motown '97 a powerful demonstration of our ongoing commitment to fight for justice in one of labor's historic home towns.

Please call Action! Motown '97 at 313-877-9016 to coordinate your efforts. They're expecting your call.

In solidarity,
John J. Sweeney, President
Richard L. Trumka, Secretary-Treasurer
Linda Chavez-Thompson,
Executive Vice President

A Detroit Striker Tells Her Story

"It's a Lockout Now, But It Feels Just Like a Strike"

The following message was posted February 28, 1997, on the Internet.

Dear folks,

I have been urged by several members to take my story on topic [that is, to post to an Internet newsgroup], so I will. As many of you remember, I am a Detroit Newspaper Striker and we have been the topic of much speculation and misinformation in the last few weeks.

One of the reasons I have not taken my story on topic is the ever-changing nature of the strike, but the bottom line (as of today) is: the six unions who make up the Metropolitan Council of Newspaper Unions made an offer of unconditional return to the Detroit Newspapers Association (an entity made up of Gannett and Knight-Ridder, publishers of the *Detroit News* and *Detroit Free Press*; they were granted a Joint Operating Agreement under the Bush administration, [thus] granting them a newspaper monopoly here in Detroit).

The newspapers accepted the offer, but refused to fire the scabs who have been putting out the paper, making the strike not a strike but a lockout. Which if you've been on strike for 20 months, like I have, feels just like a strike.

I am a member of Detroit Typographical Union Local 18. Most of my brothers and sisters have guaranteed job agreements, which the company is going to be forced to honor. I do not.

Approximately 60 percent of the union will have to retire before I get my job back, which (1) may happen and (2) can happen when pigs fly as far as I'm concerned, as this strike has been as brutal and violent on the part of

my benevolent employers as you can possibly imagine. I and my husband have both been harassed and chased, and he has been beaten up by Detroit Police (the motherfuckers). Many of my friends have been pepper-gassed and beaten up by the goon squad, Vance Security.

I am living day to day, waiting for something to happen, which is pretty stressful. I will not pretend I like the [unconditional return-to-work] "strategy," but I am a forward-thinking kind of gal and deal with the cards given me.

Whew.

I may go back in the building as an activist. I may go sit in my room and cry. I may throw bombs on the last night of the proms. Anyone with a plan please, write bigrafx@oeonline.com and submit your ideas.

Come to Detroit, June 13-14

On June 13-14 there will be a labor march in Detroit. Anyone who likes justice in the workplace please, please, please come here. There are far worse places in the springtime than Detroit (really), so come on.

I will be on the entertainment committee, and among the benefits I have helped organize is with one Billy Bragg. (Are you out there Billy? We have your choice of Red Wings tickets.) And the likes of Bruce Springsteen and many, many local blues and soul and rock and roll artists. Maybe Levi Stubbs.

Want to hear the goofy part? I still believe in justice.

Come to Detroit June 13-14.

—Barbara Ingalls

Nevertheless, a strong core of strikers remained, determined to see the struggle through. ACOSS set up the March on Detroit (MOD) Committee to circulate the Appeal widely. Copies were mailed to all national and international unions, AFL-CIO state councils, central labor bodies, and several thousand local unions affiliated with the Teamsters, Communications Workers (CWA), Graphic Communications International Union (GCIU), Newspaper Guild, United Auto Workers, and UFCW. A stream of phone calls, faxes, e-mail, and Internet messages were a vital part of the campaign, which was now directed toward getting action at the AFL-CIO's Executive Council meeting in Los Angeles in February.

Build-up to the February Meeting and the Unconditional Offer to Return to Work

As the campaign expanded and intensified to get thousands of messages from unions to Sweeney in support of a national labor march,

therefore were liable to pay back wages to all strikers.)

The most active strikers, with unanimity, rejected this strategy. They said that an unconditional offer was an unconditional surrender, that it would be perceived by workers and others throughout the country as a defeat for the strike and would demobilize forces supporting the struggle; that it would cause confusion, disorientation, and demoralization in the strikers' minds; that it would be divisive; that those workers who might be recalled would not have the protection of a union contract; and that advertisers and the reading public would be more inclined to be drawn back to the scab papers.

The unconditional return-to-work offer was announced without consultation with, or vote by, any of the striking locals except the Guild, which voted after the five other locals had already sent in their offers. (The Guild, many of whose members had already returned to work, approved the offer by something like 100-15.) Active strikers were traumatized. It was a shattering blow to the strike (now called a lockout). The *Wall Street Journal* characterized it as a "humiliating defeat" for the labor movement.

Under the circumstances it was difficult to maintain a focus on getting a national march approved at the AFL-CIO's Executive Council meeting in Los Angeles. In fact, the unconditional return-to-work offer was announced only one day before a delegation of strikers was scheduled to go to Los Angeles to try to convince the AFL-CIO to escalate the struggle by calling a national march.

Rank and File Take Over Leadership of Strike

By this time the official leaders of the six striking newspaper locals had virtually stopped functioning. They tended to the "negotiations" with the publishers, which were nothing more than surface bargaining, and they worked with the lawyers on the legal proceedings. But they left it to others, including ACOSS, to call actions and lobby the national AFL-CIO for a national march.

Rank-and-file strikers had for months been organizing actions in support of the strike in Detroit, often involving civil disobedience, without waiting for or seeking approval of the local union leaderships. So it was perfectly consistent for a delegation of six rank-and-filers to fly to Los Angeles to meet with top leaders of the labor movement.

The struggle to get a national march was clearly an uphill one. Sweeney and Trumka made no secret of the fact that they did not support the march. But they passed the buck to Carey, Bahr, and Norton, saying they would follow their lead as long as it was unanimous.

Carey visited Detroit in November 1996 while campaigning for reelection as president of the Teamsters. Asked whether he backed a national labor march in support of the newspaper workers, he said no, he didn't think it would be effective. Bahr was known to be vehemently against such a march. Norton, president of the

the top leadership of the striking unions — Ron Carey of the Teamsters, Morton Bahr of the CWA, and James Norton of the GCIU — decided to move their own agenda.

Their reasoning was as follows: the strike is going nowhere, it is endless. It is a terrible cash drain. We have other priorities, especially the march in support of the strawberry workers in Watsonville, California, on April 13. And the successful drive to organize the unorganized in Las Vegas. We'll make this unconditional offer to return to work, and if the publishers refuse to reinstate the strikers, we'll try to get a 10J injunction from a federal district court forcing them to do so. But irrespective of whether this succeeds, the clock will start ticking on a back-pay award, thereby increasing the pressure on the publishers to settle.

(This perspective of course was based on the premise that the NLRB's administrative law judge would indeed rule that the strike was an unfair labor practices strike, i.e., that the publishers had engaged in unfair labor practices and

GCIU, the smallest union involved, had not taken a stand.

Victory in Los Angeles!

Confronted with opposition to a solidarity march for the newspaper workers by the AFL-CIO's top officers, the priority being given by them to the national march for the strawberry workers, the failure of Carey, Bahr, or Norton to speak up for the march, and the weakness of the official strike leadership in Detroit, it might seem that rank-and-file strikers and the ACOSS coalition would have considered the prospects of getting the march to be hopeless. But this was not the case. While the struggle to get the march was definitely considered uphill, it was nevertheless powered by the massive support that had been generated all across the country during the three months leading up to Los Angeles. But to succeed, there had to be a dramatic change in the situation. And there was. Ron Carey, who had recently won reelection as president of the Teamsters, now came out for the march!

Norton had taken a similar position a few days earlier. Bahr, alone in his opposition and pressured by members of his own union, acceded to the other two. In the face of all this, Sweeney and Trumka withdrew their opposition.

Others played a positive role in winning endorsement of the national march, including UAW President Steve Yokich. George Becker's militant leadership in the Steelworkers union in the Bridgestone-Firestone strike and at Pittsburgh-Wheeling was also a factor.

But above all it was the movement that had been built out of Detroit and the extraordinary tenacity and persistence of local rank-and-file strike leaders which carried the day.

The AFL-CIO has now taken official action. (See the letter by Sweeney, Trumka, and Chavez-Thompson in the accompanying sidebar.) The strikers' spirits are greatly elevated, overcoming much of the damage done by the unconditional offer.

Role of the Labor Party

The Labor Party and its leadership were an important part of the mix. Tony Mazzocchi attended an ACOSS meeting in mid-January 1997 and promised support for the march. And he advised and helped guide the strikers' delegation once they arrived in Los Angeles. The LP's Interim National Council, at its second meeting, held in San Francisco on January 17, voted to encourage all LP members to solicit support for the Detroit AFL-CIO's appeal for a national march. The *Labor Party Press* featured this information fairly prominently, printing a sidebar with a heading in large type "Detroit Newspaper Strikers Need Your Help!" and also giving the March on Detroit Committee phone number (313-963-4254).

Labor Party leaders and activists in LA, San Francisco, Cleveland, Chicago, Twin Cities, and elsewhere, especially in Detroit, have worked hard to build support for the strikers and to pressure leaders of the three international unions (Teamsters, CWA, GCIU) to approve a

Model Resolution in Support of ACTION! MOTOWN '97

Whereas leaders and members of six newspaper unions in Detroit have been in a desperate battle for a living wage for some 20 months; and

Whereas the corporate owners of the *Detroit Free Press* and *Detroit News* are determined to break these unions and permanently replace all of their striking members; and

Whereas the six striking unions, their three Internationals, the Detroit Metro Labor Council (AFL-CIO), the United Auto Workers Region 1A (UAW), the Teamsters Joint Council 43, and the Michigan State AFL-CIO have called on the AFL-CIO to mobilize nationally in Detroit on June 13-14; and

Whereas on February 19, 1997, the AFL-CIO Executive Council adopted a resolution endorsing the June 13-14 mobilization in Detroit; and

Whereas AFL-CIO President John J. Sweeney wrote to the presidents of all the federation's affiliated

unions on February 20, 1997, endorsing the call for Action! Motown '97! in Detroit on June 13-14; and

Whereas President Sweeney has declared that the Detroit mobilization will take place at the same time as the Days of Action called by Canadian unions across the Detroit River in Windsor, Ontario, to protest anti-labor policies by Ontario's provincial government; and

Whereas the concurrence of U.S. and Canadian actions on June 13-14 makes this event a historic example of international worker solidarity;

Therefore be it resolved that this union pledges its full support for Action! Motown '97, the national AFL-CIO mobilization for justice in one of labor's historic hometowns; and

Be it further resolved that this union pledges to raise a fund to help finance preparations for the June 13-14 Action in support of the heroic struggle by Detroit's newspaper strikers.

national march. They made a good contribution and — especially in Detroit — built the Labor Party in the process.

What Kind of Resources

The question now becomes, How will the AFL-CIO commit to building the June mobilization, which is being called "Action! Motown '97"? The federation is spending millions on the strawberry workers march and pressing international unions and central labor councils to build it. That is all to the good. But it should do the same with the Detroit march. Instead, thus far, it has thrown the ball back to Detroit to organize the Detroit actions. How this will all play out remains to be seen.

ACOSS and other strike activists have been clear that the strawberry workers march warrants the labor movement's fullest support. But they also want resources committed to mobilizing a huge turnout for Detroit. Their slogan is for all of labor to come out massively "From Watsonville to Detroit!"

The Tasks for Working Class

Solidarity: Build the June Actions!
Class-conscious workers — together with all concerned trade unionists and worker activists

— have a special contribution to make to this struggle. Above all, they must see it as an opportunity to finally curb the onslaught against the working class waged by corporate America, escalated in recent years (including President Clinton's recent action against the pilots in the American Airlines strike), and to reverse it. No more PATCO's!

But more than that is involved. The Detroit strike must be understood as a unique situation in which rank-and-file workers have taken the leadership in one of the most important strikes in the history of the labor movement. Whatever the ultimate outcome of the strike (now technically a lockout), it will be an inspiration for all who come after, for all who struggle for a voice in deciding their own destiny in fighting the bosses.

The need now is for militants in the labor movement to step forward as march organizers in cities around the country and help ensure the largest possible outpouring of trade unions and workers generally in support of the courageous Detroit newspaper workers. All out for Detroit in June! □

February 27, 1997

Clinton's Valentine to Pilots: "Go Back to Work"

by David Jones

President Clinton's executive order directing an end to the strike by 9,000 pilots at American Airlines six minutes after it began at 12:01 a.m., February 14, was greeted with anger by the pilots, praise by Wall Street, and studied disinterest by the born-again labor bureaucrats of the AFL-CIO's Sweeney administration.

Clinton utilized provisions of the 1926 Railway Labor Act to order a 60-day no-strike "cooling off" period and to appoint a three-member Presidential Emergency Board (PEB) to recommend conditions for a settlement of the dispute. (The law was extended to cover the air transport industry in 1936.)

The American Airlines dispute was given high-profile front-page coverage in the media, allegedly because of the potential disruption of holiday travel plans on "President's Day," a legal holiday commemorating the February birthdays of George Washington and Abraham Lincoln, which was observed on Monday, February 17, this year. (Was Clinton afraid stranded passengers at Washington, D.C.'s international airports would demand overnight accommodations in the Lincoln Bedroom?)*

Clinton made a "bold gesture to avert chaos for thousands of passengers, invoking rarely used presidential powers," the *San Francisco Examiner* reported February 15. According to a February 17 report in the *Los Angeles Times* Clinton's action averted "chaotic disruptions to hundreds of thousands of passengers."

"Clinton made a hugely popular decision," the newspaper asserted, while providing no evidence, and went on to state, again without citing any support, that there was "little obvious sympathy for the pilots...because they are among the most highly paid professionals in the country."

"Labor lawyer" Allen Breslow, who clearly did have "little obvious sympathy for the pilots," was on his way to Acapulco. His trip was interrupted by an overnight stay at a Dallas hotel. "It's unfortunate that pilots making \$160,000 a year can foul up the travel plans of so many people who make \$50,000 and \$60,000 a year," Brother Breslow told a *Times* reporter. Whether Breslow was included among those who make \$50,000-\$60,000 per year was not reported.

The *Washington Post* reported that an economic impact report prepared by the administration had estimated that a strike would strand 43,000 passengers and idle 90,000 American Airline employees, and cause up to \$200 million in financial losses. "Some analysts called that a relatively small impact in the large context of

the national economy," the report said, "but that is not the way the president's advisers saw it."

"If there was a strike today and some 20% of the flying public was shut down, that would have been chaos," said one White House official. "The issue wasn't could we afford to intervene, it was could we afford not to."

The motive for the presidential order, of course, was not the preposterous contention that Clinton was concerned about the inability of Jane and John Q. Public to fulfill their travel plans on this obscure national holiday. The real reason was explained in an Op-Ed article in the February 19 *New York Times* by none other than the Great Satan of the airline industry, former Eastern Airlines chief Frank Lorenzo.

Lorenzo was in charge eight years ago when the International Association of Machinists (IAM) struck Eastern for many months. This strike was also disruptive to air travel. Pilots honored the picket lines of IAM's maintenance and baggage workers and effectively grounded the airline. But Lorenzo and Eastern thought they could defeat the union, and, Lorenzo says, "encouraged President George Bush to resist convening an emergency mediation board and imposing a 60-day return-to-work cooling-off period." There was, therefore, no back to work order by the government in the Eastern strike.

"In retrospect," Lorenzo says, "I think Eastern made a mistake...The virtually unassailable power of the pilots' unions to close down airlines has effectively neutered management's bargaining position...The Federal government," he says, "may be the only power able to maintain a reasonable balance, which," he piously adds, "protects consumers from insupportably high air fares."

This may be news to Frank Lorenzo, but most consumers probably think that air fares are already insupportably high. Unfortunately, as a result of the deregulation of the industry in the 1980s, airlines can charge whatever they want without government restriction. Also as a result of deregulation, most major airline hubs constitute virtual monopolies for their dominant carriers, such as American in Dallas-Ft. Worth, TWA in St. Louis, Northwest in Detroit and Minneapolis, and so on. If consumers don't like "insupportably high air fares," that's tough.

As any informed member of the labor movement knows, the jumble of hypocritical, self-serving, and mutually contradictory assertions served up as "news" is simply an effort to isolate the pilots in public opinion, and justify the actions taken by the president as in the public interest.

Airlines today are hugely profitable, not surprisingly since they operate under monopoly conditions, are not required to provide service to areas that don't produce super-profits, and can set prices as high as they want, while other forms of intercity mass transportation, such as rail and bus, have been reduced to virtual non-existence in most parts of the country.

Given this unambiguous bonanza, the workers in the airline industry are emboldened to seek new raises. After all, doesn't labor deserve its fair share? Labor relations throughout the airline industry are becoming increasingly "fractious," the *Washington Post* reports, "as union workers, after years of giving concessions, demand greater wage increases during an industry boom." ("Clinton Averts Air Strike," Peter Baker and Frank Swoboda, *Washington Post*, February 16, 1997.)

Union pilots at United Airlines, TWA, Continental, Northwest, and USAir are all involved in contract negotiations. From the employers' point of view, this "fractiousness" is an unfortunate by-product of their generally successful campaign to convince workers that their well-being is tied to the profitability of the particular capitalist enterprise they work for.

American's president, Robert Crandall, lamented the pilots' faith in the airline's profitability — "The only time you can get a good deal from the pilots is when you're broke."

"Clinton...sent a signal to all airline workers, particularly pilots, that could severely restrict their bargaining power," the *Los Angeles Times* reported. "Encouraged by the stronger possibility of government interventions to prevent strikes, airline bosses now have little incentive to accept union demands."

The Railway Labor Act was adopted in the wake of a national railroad strike by shopcraft unions in 1922. The strike was broken after six months, and company unions were installed in most railroad shops, which were not dislodged until the labor upsurge of the mid-1930s. Although the strike was defeated, it was at the cost of great disruption and expense, both political and economic. Tens of thousands of strike-breakers had to be hired transported, put in place, and protected. The most far-reaching anti-strike injunction in U.S. history was issued by the federal courts.

While serving as a legal vehicle for attacking union activity and overt expressions of support for the strikers, the very success of that 1922 injunction, by its extreme partisan nature, tended to undermine the authority of the government to speak and act in the name of the

*The 19th century labor movement often quoted Lincoln's statement to Congress in 1861, "Labor is prior to, and independent of, capital...and deserves much the higher consideration." One can assume that this information is not part of the package provided to campaign contributors who rent the Lincoln Bedroom from America's sleaziest chief executive at the Motel-White House.

"entire people," and strengthened the arguments of those in the labor movement who said the government was merely the executive committee of the bosses.

The Railway Labor Act therefore conceded the possibility of legal recognition to the rail unions while putting in place an elaborate mechanism for diverting and preventing strikes. It was careful not to formally outlaw strikes in principle while providing a means to defuse and defeat them through government authority to impose settlements of disputes.

It is not true, as was widely reported, that the Railway Labor Act is "rarely used," although it is accurate that it has not been utilized in the airline industry for thirty years. It has been invoked over 250 times since its enactment some 70 years ago, by Democratic and Republican presidents alike. Simple arithmetic discloses that it was last used in the airline industry (against the International Association of Machinists) by Democratic President Lyndon Johnson. It has been invoked several times before by President Clinton in minor rail labor disputes.

When railroad workers struck in 1946, Democratic President Harry Truman, held up today by the union bureaucracy as a great friend of labor, expressed his sentiments in the first draft of a speech he made calling for an end to the strike.

Truman called for volunteers to "come along with me and eliminate the [John L.] Lewises [militant president of the United Mineworkers], the Whitneys [A.F. Whitney, president of the Trainmen's Union]" and other labor leaders. "Let's put transportation and production back to work, hang a few traitors and make our own country safe for democracy," Truman urged. Truman's advisers toned down some of the language for the final draft, but the message was the same. (Quoted in "The Inflation Crisis and Strike Wave of 1946," unpublished thesis by Steven K. Ashby, University of Chicago.)

"The biggest strikebreaker in the world," declared A.F. Whitney, "is sitting in the White House."

The Railway Labor Act has not been used more frequently in the airline industry for purely tactical reasons, on which the airline bosses and the government have been in complete accord, as Frank Lorenzo verifies. Since, unlike in the rail industry, the air transport unions, especially the pilots, generally did not honor the picket lines of other crafts, the problem of the unions having the ability to shut down the airlines usually did not arise. When it did, usually in the case of a pilots' strike, the impact was limited by the existence of many more airlines prior to deregulation, hubs that were not monopolized by one carrier, and mutual aid pacts among the carriers that minimized losses and allowed them to wait out the strikers.

A White House spokesperson was quoted as saying, with (apparently) unconscious irony, "There has not been a Presidential emergency board in an aviation case for 30 years, but the

fact of the matter is aviation has changed. It is unregulated now." Everything, that is, except labor.

In 1991 President Bush invoked the Railway Labor Act to set up an PEB to make proposals for pending national rail contracts, headed by the same Robert Harris whom President Clinton has appointed to chair this latest PEB. Congress imposed that panel's anti-union recommendations on the rail unions by a near-unanimous vote and forced an end to the April 1991 national rail strike after eighteen hours.

This experience played a major part in helping Labor Party supporters in the Brotherhood of Maintenance of Way Employees (BMWE), the second largest U.S. rail union, to convince BMWE to become the third national union to endorse Labor Party Advocates.

In the case of the 90-plus-day strike by the United Transportation Union against the Soo Line Railroad in 1994, there was no intervention by Clinton as long as it was clear that the railroad wanted a free hand to try to defeat the union, even though the strike clearly caused significant economic disruption.

When it became apparent that the union was prepared, after over three months on strike, to begin extending its picket lines to connecting railroads, Clinton issued the back to work order within hours.

Clinton's action, especially to those who are either unaware of, or deliberately obfuscate, how this political and economic system functions, appears to be a rude affront to a labor movement which spent some \$30 million in 1996 to keep him in the White House. And John Sweeney didn't even get a night in the Lincoln Bedroom.

The union bureaucrats are well aware that the use of the Railway Labor Act is routine and undifferentiated by political party. But that is not what they tell the rank and file whom they try to bamboozle into voting for the Democrats. In this case, they hide behind the excuse that the pilots' union at American is not affiliated with the AFL-CIO. As the *Los Angeles Times* reported, Clinton's action was "taken with the comfort of knowing that not too many union leaders were going to complain about it."

"One White House aide," the paper reported, "recalled the response from an AFL-CIO official about the possibility of presidential action. 'These guys aren't our guys,' the representative said." (*Los Angeles Times*, February 17.)

Who are "their guys"? The union bu-

reaucracy under Lane Kirkland's titular leadership did everything it could to defeat the members of UFCW Local P-9 on strike against the Hormel company in Austin, Minnesota, in 1986. They weren't "their guys" either.

The new improved Sweeney leadership of the AFL-CIO has stood passively by throughout the Detroit newspaper strike. They weren't "their guys" either, apparently.

The truth is, the overpaid, underworked union hierarchy is mortally afraid of the confrontation with the combined forces of corporate-controlled government and big business that would necessarily result from any concerted struggle in Austin, Detroit, American Airlines, or anywhere else that their interests are fundamentally challenged. They just want to be left alone, by the rank and file and by the bosses, so they can enjoy their manicures, gold-tipped shoelaces, pinky rings, and other emoluments of office.

Douglas Dority of the UFCW and Gerald McAntee of AFSCME, both supporters of the new Sweeney regime, were quoted in the national press recently as complaining mightily about the failure of the AFL-CIO Executive Committee to hold their winter meeting in the comfortable environs of Bal Harbour, Florida, for the first time since the Gompers era.

Nevertheless, the perception by many unionists that Clinton is more and more emboldened to affront the sensibilities of organized labor is correct. This will certainly not be the last time the right-to-work governor in the White House contemptuously disregards the labor movement. Each time he does, it will be harder for the political old-guard of the unions to persuade the rank and file to go down the line for the Democrats. Now that there is an organization rooted in the unions arguing for a political alternative, each occasion ought to provide the opportunity to win new converts, and new support, to the Labor Party and its perspective of independent labor political action. □

March 2, 1997



Dems-GOP Finding New "Center" — Unite to Finish Off Remains of Social Contract

by Bill Onasch

This article, Part One of a two-part series, is reprinted from the Kansas City Area Labor Party Advocate, publication of the KCA Labor Party chapter.

Evolution of the Social Contract

Accompanying the restructuring of the U.S. economy — with its increasing integration into a global economy — has been the restructuring of our Social Contract. Of course this contract has never been codified into a single document. It is a collection of protections and guarantees won by working people from their employers and government through struggles over the years.

The initial main body of these social reforms has been known historically as the New Deal, attributed to President Franklin Roosevelt. These accomplishments — which included introducing Social Security; unemployment compensation; the minimum wage; the Fair Labor Standards Act, regulating hours of work and pay; the Wagner Act, giving some protections to the right of workers to collective bargaining — came in response to big labor battles in the 1930s that shook our society to its very foundations.

LBJ's Reforms

Another important package of reforms came thirty years later in the form of Lyndon B. Johnson's Great Society. This included the establishment of Medicare, food stamps, greatly expanded AFDC and SSI benefits, student loan programs enabling working class kids to go to college, the launching of Head Start, and major government commitments to housing, job training, and mass transit.

These reforms also were in response to mass social upheavals, but this time it was not the unions in the lead. LBJ had to contend with a mass civil rights movement, a number of so-called riots in Black communities across the country, and, above all, a nation deeply divided over the Vietnam war. Johnson maintained that America could have both guns *and* butter. His reform program sought to ameliorate domestic discontent and forestall the threat (to him) of opponents of the war uniting with the civil rights and labor movements.

While there have been some incremental changes over the past thirty years, the Great Society was the finishing touch on the essentials of our Social Contract. Our contract was inferior to those of most other major industrialized countries. As a consequence, America has always had a much bigger layer of poor people than Europe, Canada, and Japan.

Flawed Strategy — An Inferior Contract

This was largely due, in my opinion, to strategic errors on the part of our labor movement. After

World War II, most unions increasingly ignored the basic principle of *class* solidarity and concentrated on serving only their own dues-paying members. Instead of organizing politically to improve Social Security, win universal health care, mandate paid time-off, and guarantee jobs or adequate welfare for all — as their counterparts in Europe did — unions in the U.S. opted to negotiate benefit plans with individual employers.

For about three decades this approach seemed to work for its narrow constituency. It produced what some came to call a "labor aristocracy." Most of the organized part of the working class enjoyed high wages, good health care, and substantial pensions to implement paltry Social Security.

But while most unionists' living standards steadily improved over the 1950s and '60s, those of many other workers stagnated, or even fell behind. During the most prosperous times there were still millions living in poverty, and tens of millions living much more modestly than unionized workers. Few were able to obtain the high level of union health care and pension benefits and some had no insurance or pensions at all. Inflation gnawed away at the minimum wage, transforming it into a poverty wage.

Little was done by labor to try to organize these workers. Instead of maintaining the sympathy of unorganized workers, as had been the case during the labor battles of the '30s, more and more the unions were viewed with envy and resentment.

Gravy Train Derails

The "labor aristocracy" first came under serious attack during the '70s and is today an endangered species. Plant closings, deregulation, revolutions in technology, and outsourcing have decimated its ranks. The union share of the workforce has been cut in half. Only when you discount the substantial growth of unions in the public sector over the past twenty years does it become clear just how devastating the decline of unionism has been in private sector manufacturing, mining, transportation, and even construction.

The millions of workers displaced from union jobs during the restructuring over the past two decades got a rude awakening to the limitations of our Social Contract. Their employer-provided health insurance and pension contributions were abruptly cut off. Unemployment compensation provided little and lasted only a few months. The minimum wage gener-

ally paid less than what they got on unemployment comp. Workers accustomed to five and six weeks of vacation a year found themselves getting only a week or two — if they were lucky enough to find other full-time employment.

Those who remain on the job in the traditional union bastions are facing constant demands by the employers to roll back not only wages but especially those benefits, such as health care, pensions, and paid time off, that are universally guaranteed by law in other industrialized countries. Today, it's clear American labor's postwar strategy doesn't compare very well to what unions elsewhere accomplished politically, through parties of their own.

Long Knives Unsheathed

Even though our Social Contract was standard compared to others, it nevertheless provided some minimal protections against the worst ravages of poverty and established a floor upon which organized workers could build. While there have always been episodic disputes over how much employers and the government should be required to fund its component parts, serious attacks on the fundamental principles of the Contract are a recent development.

Of course the goals of these attacks are not honestly stated. No one plainly says, "We want to wreck the Social Contract to enable us to gut the wages, benefits, and conditions of the entire working class in order to enrich the bosses and bankers at workers' expense."

When Bill Clinton was first elected in 1992 he declared that the era of Big Government, of "tax and spend," was over. We would have a leaner government and soon a balanced budget as well. This got a popular response. Most of us have gripes about aspects of government policies and have had frustrating experiences dealing with the government bureaucracy. And just about everybody feels over-taxed.

But Clinton was not talking about shrinking the bloated military, cutting back on government handouts to Big Business, or making the rich pay their fair share of taxes. From day one he made clear that everything in the Social Contract — including Social Security — was "on the table," that is, subject to cuts or even elimination.

Clinton's New Democrat agenda faced slow going during his first two years, when Congress was still controlled by "Old Democrats," trained in the rhetoric of the New Deal and Great Society. The White House had to rely heavily on the Republicans to ram through NAFTA.

The '94 election opened up new opportunities. A new Republican leadership displaced the Old Guard Democrats on Capitol Hill. And many Democrats elected in '94 — such as Karen McCarthy — were of the New Democrat variety, who supported most of Gingrich's Contract on America.

The first year of the "Republican revolution" was marked by sometimes boisterous confrontations between Congress and the White House. This was largely posturing and strength-measuring. By '96 Newt began to cool down and Clinton went more than half-way to make deals with the Republican leadership — often ignor-

ing and embarrassing his own party's congressional leaders.

Just as the bosses generally first pick on the weakest link when beginning a crackdown on their work force, Clinton and Gingrich teamed up to go after the part of the Social Contract that was perceived to have the least support — welfare. Appealing to ignorance and prejudice, they pushed through an unconscionable attack on the poorest and least-employable section of the working class — and their children as well.

During the '96 election campaign, Clinton cynically denounced the GOP for wanting to destroy Medicare. The fact was that Clinton had

proposed cuts in Medicare in every budget he submitted. Recently he agreed to "split the difference" with the Republicans on the depth of these cuts. He is also supporting Republican efforts to undermine the overtime protections of the Fair Labor Standards Act, and to modify the Consumer Price Index — which would cost workers and retirees billions of dollars a year.

But most ominous is the attack that is shaping up on the most sacred part of the Social Contract — Social Security. We'll deal with this in the second part of this article in our next issue. □

Why Canada Unions Will March in Windsor, Ontario, June 13–14

by Barry Weisleder

As an illustration of anti-union actions by the Ontario government and how unionists seek to fight back, we reprint the following excerpt from the February 1997 Union Report of Ontario Public Service Employees Union (OPSEU), Region 5. The author is an Executive Board member of OPSEU.

They Privatize, We Organize!

The biggest and most crucial fightback campaign ever launched by OPSEU is now under way. The Union is moving to take on the arch-Conservative government of Mike Harris as it seeks to privatize and divest public services and jobs on many fronts. This includes downloading services to the municipalities, and forcing amalgamated cities and school boards to cut or sell off. The Tory goal is to further enrich their already wealthy friends. Our goal is to save the quality and universality of service, and protect jobs with decent wages, benefits, and union representation.

Meetings of the Executive Board in December and January voted to make this fight a top priority. New literature and public educational tools, plans for coalition building, lobbying of politicians, and direct membership action are in the works.

Campaign staff are working with locals, like Local 531, Queen St. Mental Health Centre, which has helped to launch a dynamic community coalition called Friends of Queen Street to fight the forced merger with the Clarke Institute. We're working with our members at the Ontario Clean Water Agency, with our Property Assessors in the Ministry of Finance, with members

in Corrections facilities threatened with closures and new private "super-jails," and with Local 586, the largest group of Income Maintenance Officers, which has launched a campaign to keep income support programs at the provincial level (just as David Crombie's Who Does What panel recommended).

On February 10, several staff and I met with members of Local 591, Ministry of Consumer and Commercial Relations at Bloor and Islington, who are threatened with imminent privatization. Our message is the same to all: we are working now to raise membership and broad public awareness of the terrible social cost of privatization and divestment; we are trying to stop these plans (as members of Local 261 at a long-term care facility in Milton succeeded in doing). But the moment a privatization/divestment occurs, we will move in quickly to sign up everyone and apply for union recognition. Establishment of collective bargaining rights is key to a future with any measure of security and dignity. OPSEU is committed to following our work, and organizing it.

But we may be organizing many new members too, given this period of flux in jurisdictions. To cope with new challenges and opportunities, the Board voted to broaden its

Organizing Policy. "OPSEU will organize all workers who have a desire to share in the benefits of collective bargaining and union membership. An organizing priority will be to follow our members' work in the event of divestment or privatization."

The Broader Public Sector within OPSEU is sure to grow fast, given our ongoing commitment to organize in areas like developmental services, children's aid, hospitals, ambulances, and universities... We have to be ready.

The \$200,000 allocated to the "Fight Back — It Works" campaign, consisting of public meetings, protests, and advertising against Tory so-called "disentanglement" and privatization, is a good beginning.

But in my view, what's missing from this picture — and this is crucial — is a province-wide, mass action perspective. We can't afford to wait three more years. [The] single-city Days of Action alone won't do the trick. To save our jobs, rights, services, and basic democracy, we urgently need a province-wide strike to kick out the Tories. We need a political alternative, one based on a workers' agenda. On this vital question, at the top, tragically, OPSEU remains silent. It's up to us to change that. □

Teamsters Five-Year Plan

by Charles Walker

Unite to take on employers. All union officials must put union politics aside and put members' interests first.

— *Teamsters Action Plan*

Just a month before his second inauguration, scheduled for March 22, Teamsters President Ron Carey has sent the principal officers of 580 local unions his general outline for building a strong Teamsters union over the next five years. In a separate letter, Carey urges the local union officialdom and all Teamsters to unite behind a common strategy to meet "the enormous challenges from greedy employers and anti-labor politicians."

During the past five years, Carey faced relentless opposition from a majority of the union's officers, despite his dogged attempt to win them over to his "members first" policies. No wonder then, that Carey's letter contains a provision that implies that not all officers are expected to unite behind a common strategy: "The international Union will concentrate its efforts on working with those local unions and members who are committed to this Action Plan."

Clearly that means that the international's scarce resources will not be available to those officers who continue to give aid and comfort to employers, as was done on February 7, 1994, when some officers scabbed on the strike against United Parcel Service (UPS) and prevented 70,000 workers from joining with 90,000 strikers in an attempt to stop the company from chiseling on a freshly signed contract. Again in 1994, some officials attempted to undermine the first national freight strike since 1979 by publicly taking the bosses' side, and demonstrating against Carey in front of the Teamsters' Washington, D.C., headquarters. On the other hand, Carey says that all members, retirees, and family members, not just officers, are welcome to join the "fight for the future of working families."

Plan Mirrors Campaign Platform

Carey's seven-point "Action Plan" closely mirrors the platform he victoriously ran on in last fall's election, when he beat the Hoffa, Jr., opposition with a 52% majority. At the top of the list, Carey once again asks that officials put internal politics aside and unite to take on the bosses, open the doors to membership activism, and build alliances with other unions and community organizations.

Carey proposes that the local unions build "member-to-member networks at Teamster job sites so that all workers are kept informed and involved..." and further, that local unions and the international union formulate area standards for wages and conditions in order to foil company attempts to divide workers by whipsawing them.

Carey asks local unions to join with the international union in spending far more money on organizing, and proposes that the union train "10,000 members, retirees, and family members as volunteer organizers during the next five years." Carey's plan also advocates that "Teamster pension and health plan trustees be elected democratically by participating local unions," rather than chosen by select groups of union officers.

Carey's plan would open the contractual grievance machinery to rank and file members and train them to deal with its pitfalls, and he says, "Establish and enforce standards of conduct to ensure that panel members [typically officers] carry out their responsibilities properly and that all members are treated fairly."

Lastly, Carey proposes that unspecified strategies other than the grievance procedure be adopted to take on bosses who violate members' rights. The plan would take "strong action against any official who engages in wrongdoing, including mob influence, stealing from members, blacklisting, favoritism in hiring, withholding information about contracts, or other violations of members' rights."

Regrettably, the Carey plan includes provisions for political action that do not break with organized labor's support of the bosses' two-party system. The plan's call for independent political action opposes giving a blank check to the Republican and Democratic parties, but calls for support to "pro-labor public officials" and actions to keep those elected politicians "focused on Teamster issues."

In short, Carey proposes another version of organized labor's failed policy of "rewarding friends and punishing enemies." That policy prevailed before unions became "joined at the hip" with the Democratic party. Unlike AFL-CIO President John Sweeney, Carey has not criticized the founding of the new Labor Party and he did send official observers to the party's founding convention. Several of Carey's aides are prominent Labor Party leaders.

TDU Strategy Meeting

By coincidence, several days after Carey's "Action Plan" was sent to the union officialdom, the Teamsters for a Democratic Union (TDU) convened a "National Strategy Meeting" in Detroit, Michigan. TDU is a rank and file caucus within the Teamsters that has been widely credited with tipping the electoral scales in Carey's favor in 1991 and again in 1996. In a letter, Carey thanked TDU for its support and noted that the organization made a big difference in the election. Carey also welcomed help from all Teamsters, "even if they opposed us in 1996."

For two days, nearly 150 activists, union officers, and international union staff members

discussed the IBT's goals and what TDU's objectives should be for the next three years.

Of course, TDU's leadership endorses Carey's "Action Plan" and intends to work through the international union and accessible local unions. But additionally, TDU aims to qualitatively enlarge membership involvement at all levels of the union. For example, TDU advocates rank and file members on all bargaining committees, elected shop stewards, and stewards councils that link up members across local union lines.

Further, TDU believes that the 10,000 volunteer organizers that Carey hopes to recruit to local union committees should also stay mobilized between organizing campaigns and be deployed in contract campaigns and grass-roots political and community actions.

In short, TDU's strategy is aimed at moving the local unions away from the typical top-down service union model, or business union model, that took hold everywhere, even in the industrial unions, following World War II. In its place TDU advocates building the "organizing model of unionism," whose chief feature is membership activism as the ultimate guarantor of union democracy.

UPS Contract Expires July 31

How well Carey's "Action Plan" and TDU's organizing model union strategies meld and are received by members and officers will be tested this year during the United Parcel Service (UPS) contract negotiations and campaign. The current four-year UPS contract expires July 31.

Carey plans to organize a high-profile nationwide contract campaign to rally the 180,000 UPS Teamsters to bolster the union's bargaining power, and if necessary, strike power. Carey plans an unprecedented emphasis on promoting rank and file activism and UPS work site actions. If Carey has his way, at least several thousand rank and filers are likely to respond to his initiatives to get the ranks involved in the fight for an improved contract. But, of course, Carey's plans can be partially blocked by local union officers. For example, a majority of officers from Northern California UPS locals voted in late February *not* to permit rank and filers on the regional negotiating committee.

"Only Hope"?

Throughout the TDU strategy meeting, many speakers salted the discussion with instances of local union officers squelching activism by blocking attempts by the international union and TDU activists to inform and mobilize members.

Still, one prominent union officer said that the IBT doesn't have the resources to take on all the problems and must rely on local unions' initiative. "We've got to get local officers to change, it's our only hope," he concluded.

It's not likely that his view of the ranks' "only hope" is the view of most TDU members and leaders. However, the floor discussion revealed that many TDU activists understand the

Continued on next page

From the Horse's Mouth: When Teamsters Corruption Flourished

Devil's Pact: Inside the World of the Teamsters Union, by F.C. Duke Zeller. Birch Lane Press, Secaucus, NJ, 368 pp., \$24.95.

Reviewed by Charles Walker

This insider's account of sleaze and corruption at the highest echelon of the Teamsters bureaucracy certainly confirms many of the rank and file's worst suspicions.

The insider is Duke Zeller, formerly the communications director (for 14 years) of the Teamsters Union, the nation's largest private-sector union. The book is chiefly a portrayal of Jackie Presser, the onetime Teamsters president, mob associate, and FBI informant. (Presser's history was more extensively detailed in *Mobbed Up*, by James Neff, which has useful notes and an extensive bibliography, lacking in Zeller's book.)

In 1978, Zeller was employed as an assistant to Presser, with the approval of Frank Fitzsimmons, the union's president.

Later, Presser told Zeller that "Fitzsimmons received a kickback on nearly every freight contract he negotiated. There wasn't anything Fitzsimmons did on any contract where he didn't get money... Fitz would stash the cash away beneath a loose floorboard, under a rug in his home, or in the lining of an old raincoat he had hanging in his closet."

In 1981, Fitzsimmons died and was succeeded by Roy Williams, whose "election came — politburo style — by unanimous vote of the general executive board, after a 20-minute meeting in Las Vegas." In 1983, Williams resigned following his jury conviction for conspiring to bribe a senator. "The union picked up the entire cost of his defense. As a result, in salary, expenses, and benefits as general president in 1982, Williams personally received \$813,247." Later, Williams turned government informer, gaining his release from prison.

On April 21, 1983, Presser was unanimously chosen by the Teamsters General Executive Board to replace Williams, overcoming some initial opposition. "Don't worry," Presser told Zeller, "I'm locked in through the boys in the East." Zeller adds, "The 'boys' were the Mafia." And if the "boys" couldn't deliver the vote of every General Executive Board member, there was another option — payoffs.

Vice President Jesse Carr totaled up his spoils: "I got another plane, two new offices, a new secretary, the Western Conference of Teamsters, and more money. That's not bad for one vote."

Presser did all right, too: "His combined salary for all his union posts immediately jumped to \$548,000." Zeller testifies that "the drawers of Jackie's bedroom bureau

were stuffed with money received as kickbacks from various union contracts. Whenever a Teamster watch, cufflink, flashlight, bookmark — whatever — was purchased, Jackie got a cut. And Presser believed that most of the general executive board were doing the same."

Jackie Presser's climb to the international union's top began in 1966, when his father, Bill Presser, set up a new Teamsters local union in Cleveland and put his son in charge. The father was convicted in 1971 of embezzling union funds and extortion.

Nevertheless, the elder Presser stayed on in the union and later simultaneously held down seven posts, including trustee of the multi-billion dollar Central States Pension Fund and Teamsters vice president, knocking down a combined salary of \$145,541.

Jackie Presser eventually replaced his father on the pension fund, and in 1976, he and other trustees were sued by the Labor Department because of "\$120 million in illegal loans made to Las Vegas casinos and organized crime figures."

Still in 1980, President-elect Ronald Reagan "named Presser a senior advisor for labor and economic affairs on his transition team." The Presser regime ended with his death from cancer in July 1988. His wife of less than three years receives \$7,500 a month from the Teamsters pension fund.

Was FBI Part of the Corruption?

At the time of his death, Presser was awaiting trial in a \$3 million suit. The Cleveland rank and filers who brought the suit claimed that Presser and another officer had defrauded the local union by hiring "ghost employees." This was done even though in August 1985 "the FBI revealed that it had authorized Presser to make payments to the ghost employees on the union payroll."

The author relates that Presser was an FBI snitch and "a major one at that. On a regular

basis Jackie was passing information to assigned agents in the Bureau, detailing who among the Mafia and his fellow Teamsters was connected, disclosing information on friends and foes alike."

Zeller admits that he himself shared in the good things of life enjoyed by the Teamsters upper crust: "an expense account, credit cards, and my own 'Teamstermobile' (a new Lincoln Town Car)."

Zeller also participated in the officials' lies and deceptions. For example, in 1984, Presser ordered Zeller to cook up a phony membership poll that would favor Reagan over Mondale.

Four years later, the new Teamsters president, Billy McCarthy, had Zeller phony up another membership poll, this time with George Bush the "winner" and Michael Dukakis the "loser."

Back Into the Cookie Jar?

Perhaps Zeller partly wrote this book to try to get back into the Teamsters cookie jar.

The book contains a full-page photo portrait of James Hoffa, Jr., the presidential candidate of the old-guard bureaucrats in the recent Teamster elections. And the last chapter, titled "Here's Jimmy Hoffa," reads, in part, like a press release from the Hoffa Jr. campaign.

Zeller depicts the younger Hoffa "as the white knight who many believed would ride into the 1996 campaign to save a Teamsters Union in distress." And Teamster President Ron Carey, writes Zeller before the votes were counted in December, "is fiercely resented by a membership incensed not only by reports of his alleged mob connections but also by his self-aggrandizing dalliance as a real estate tycoon..."

But thanks to the Teamsters rank and file, Carey has been reelected president, and Hoffa Junior and Zeller will be stuck with their current day jobs. □

Teamsters Five-Year Plan

Continued from previous page

union's bureaucracy as no more than a leadership elite, common to most, if not all, hierarchically structured organizations. The activists appear unfamiliar with the view that the labor bureaucracy is a caste with separate interests that, at bottom, are hostile to the members' basic interests.

The leadership problem, the activists might say, is to reform the bureaucracy by casting out the bad or corrupt elements, not rooting out the bureaucracy as such. As a result, the activists have yet to move beyond the strategy of building a democratic opposi-

tion caucus (TDU), as a unionwide counterweight to the bureaucracy. TDU has said the union needs a "corps of active Teamsters who are prepared to give time and energy to the Teamsters movement." Presumably that means something more than a democratic caucus and something much larger than TDU. But the reform group has yet to figure out how such a "corps of active Teamsters" can be brought together and achieve critical mass, despite layers of bureaucracy standing in the way. But then, doesn't Carey have the same problem? □

February 27, 1997

"Fourth Wave" of Strike at End of February

Korean Unions To Resume General Strike

Text of Korean Strike Bulletin

The following text was posted on the "labr.global" conference of the IGC computer network from "KCTU-International" (kctuint@chollian.da.com.co.kr) (by way of AMRC [amrc@hk.super.net])

Although the English wording is often unidiomatic, and sometimes difficult to follow, we have mainly left the text of this "Struggle for Labor Law Reforms Campaign News" as it was put into English by the KCTU.

KOREAN CONFEDERATION OF TRADE UNIONS

Struggle for Labor Law Reforms
Campaign News XXIII
February 25, 1997

The Final Round

Recognize the Teachers' Union
Stop Mass Redundancy Dismissal
Lift the Ban on Paid Full-time Union
Officers
End Trade Union Repression

Strike Action to Resume on February 26

The Central Committee of the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions, on February 25, 1997, resolved to embark on the fourth wave of the general strike to bring the nationwide mass action that began the day after Christmas last year to a successful conclusion. The Korean Confederation of Trade Unions will resume strike action on February 26 to culminate in an all-out strike of all the members on February 28. The decision came as the political parties, both the ruling party and opposition parties, continue to vacillate over the key issues of the labor law.

The National Assembly, reopened for an extraordinary session on February 17, 1997, began the proceedings for the re-amendment [and rewriting] of the railroad labor laws to be completed by the end of February before the December 26 version comes into effect. This follows the retreat by the Kim Young Sam government, which on January 21, 1997, conceded, in the face of a month-long general strike, to a rewrite of the much-denounced labor laws.

The Ten-Point Demand

The Central Committee decision came after the February 22 announcement of 10 core demands for labor law amendment. Following a meeting of the expanded executive committee, president Kwon Young Kil proclaimed that the KCTU was prepared to accept a moratorium on legal recognition if the following 10 demands were met in the labor laws amendment:

- guarantee of freedom of association for teachers and government employees.
- annulment of the ban on payment of wage for full-time union officers at company level.

- restoration of union membership eligibility for dismissed workers (until the decision of the Supreme Court).
- complete repeal of the prohibition on third-party intervention.
- reinstatement of the ban on replacement of striking workers from outside the plant under dispute.
- revocation of the ban on remuneration for the period of strike.
- cancellation of the ban on industrial action within production facilities.
- narrowing of the scope of "essential services" subject to compulsory arbitration.
- withdrawal of the legal provisions for mass redundancy dismissal.
- limitation of the variable working hours system to full work day for alternate Saturdays.

The decision signifies a delay in the legal recognition for the KCTU, the nerve-end of the decade-long campaign for labor law reform and the subject of the ardent desire of the democratic trade union movement.

The KCTU decision is based on two reasons. The dramatic turn-around was aimed at pressuring the political parties to make an earnest commitment to the removal of the pernicious provisions in the December 26 labor laws which would straight-jacket trade union activities and negate the effect and power of collective industrial action. The surprise decision also reflects the KCTU's commitment to win legal recognition for the Korean Teachers and Educational Workers Union (Chunkyojo, KTU), a historic partner in the birth and development of the democratic trade union movement.

The KCTU decision is targeted at the unwillingness of the government and political parties in the National Assembly to engage in a serious and sincere effort to guarantee trade union rights. The Kim Young Sam government and the political parties, while compelled by the force of the general strike to make a commitment for re-amendment, remain covered by the fear of straying out of the favor of the big business groups [chaebols].

Furthermore, they remain uncommitted to the principle of freedom of association for teachers and government employees from the fear of running against the powerful private school owners lobby and bureaucracy.

Their attitude, in a more long-term perspective, also reflects their concern over the potential development of the trade union movement as a potent political force which could challenge their monopoly on political and policy affairs.

Political Procrastination

The National Assembly proceedings for the rewriting of the labor laws began with two public hearings by the Standing Committee on Environment and Labor.

KCTU President Kwon Young Kil, appearing before the first public hearing on February 19, dealing with general trade union rights issues (and attended by representatives of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, Education International, and Public Services International) highlighted freedom of association for teachers and government employees as the central demand. He also presented documentation on paid full-time union officers and representatives at company levels and remuneration during the strike period in the OECD member countries to counter the Korean government's argument that such practices are unique to Korea.

The ruling party remained silent during the initial period of the National Assembly proceedings. It maintained that the December 26 action represented its best effort and that it was up to the opposition parties to bring forward proposals for change for negotiation. The ruling party's attitude forced the opposition parties under an unenviable spotlight.

In response, the two major opposition parties — the National Congress for New Politics led by Kim Dae Jung and the United Liberal Democrats led by Kim Jong Pil — on February 24 finally produced a single set of proposals for change in the labor laws. The opposition agenda proposes, on the one hand, to lift the ban on union pluralism at the federation and national center level immediately while maintaining the moratorium on the enterprise level. On the other hand, they remain silent on the issue of unionization for teachers and government employees.

On the redundancy dismissal — or layoff — issue, the two opposition political parties proposed to introduce a new law to regulate mass dismissals for managerial reasons. Their proposed arrangement reflects their wish to appease the powerful big business groups while

not ignoring the anger and resistance of the working people.

Failings of the Opposition Parties

While the opposition parties have produced a set of proposals which appear to approximate the trade union demands, they have failed to allay the widespread suspicion that they are only going through the motions, without a real commitment to uphold internationally recognized standards and fight off the ruling party's intransigence. Their efforts, it is interpreted, are aimed at coming out of the current labor law conjuncture unscathed. They hope to achieve this goal, it is said, by putting up, on the one hand, an appearance of representing the aspirations of the working people, and by, on the other hand, appeasing the powerful business groups in substance by not putting up an earnest fight to defend their pronounced positions.

The General Strike: Aspiration and struggle of the working people

The Central Committee decision to embark on the fourth wave of general strike comes at a time when the fate of the labor law remains in balance.

The Central Committee has streamlined the KCTU demands to sharpen the focus of the general strike. It calls for:

- legal recognition for the teachers union.
- complete withdrawal of the legislative provisions for layoffs.
- revocation of the ban on payment of wages to full-time union officers or representatives at the company level.
- an end to reprisals against unionists for their just actions of resistance against the repressive labor laws.

The fourth wave general strike will begin on February 26 by a mass protest rally in Seoul by union shop stewards in front of the ruling party office.

The rallyists will, then, join the hundreds of teachers conducting a sit-in protest at the offices of the two opposition parties. On the second day, February 27, the strike action will escalate to a strike involving all of the shop stewards at company level, to be followed by mass protest rallies at the major urban centers throughout the country. The fourth general strike will culminate on February 28 with a full general strike bringing all KCTU members out onto the streets.

The Central Committee has not decided on the length of the full general strike, leaving it to be determined in accordance with the changing situation.

The fourth wave general strike, taking place at the critical moment in the parliamentary proceedings, will demonstrate the determination of the working people not to leave their destiny in the hands of short-sighted politicians but to win their rights and welfare through struggle. □

Teamsters President Protests Korea Labor Laws

Carey Supports Striking South Korean Workers

Text of Letter from Ron Carey to Kim Young Sam

On January 12, Ron Carey, president of the largest private-sector union in North America, the International Brotherhood of Teamsters, issued a sharp protest addressed to the South Korean President Kim Young Sam. The text of the letter follows.

January 10, 1997

President Kim Young Sam
Republic of Korea
The Blue House
Seoul 110-050
Republic of Korea

Via fax: 82 2 770 02 53

Dear Mr. President:

As the largest union in North America, with 1.4 million members, we strongly oppose your government's unfair treatment of the working men and women of South Korea. We are specifically shocked and disheartened to learn of the very damaging labor legislation which the South Korean government recently passed in a secret meeting, absent of opposition party members and within only seven minutes.

The International Brotherhood of Teamsters protests against the adoption of the new unfair

labor laws which restrict the right of workers to organize, allow for the replacement of striking workers, [and] allow for...temporary or seasonal labor, greatly contributing to the exploitation of workers and the unhealthy instability of the labor market in South Korea. Moreover, this legislation goes as far as to give employers a free hand to dismiss and exploit workers.

Our union has met with and has established especially strong bonds with officials of the democratic trade union movement in Korea. I understand that your prosecutors have summoned forty such labor leaders as a form of harassment signaling a crackdown against the strikers and their leaders.

The Right to Withhold Labor

The most fundamental trade union right is the right of workers to withhold their labor in a strike. Any retaliation by your government

against Korean workers exercising this universal right will be viewed by the Teamsters Union as the most serious of human rights violations and we will respond with the swiftest and strongest means available.

We intend to prevail upon our national trade union center, the AFL-CIO, the ICFTU, and the TUAC to immediately organize a mission, composed of trade union officials from around the world, to Korea to investigate the new anti-worker and anti-union labor laws your government has inflicted upon the Korean people. We will also join with other North American trade union and human rights activists today to demonstrate at the Korean Embassy to add our voices to the millions world-wide who abhor the actions taken by your government.

Sincerely yours,

/s/Ron Carey, General President

South Korean Workers and "Globalization"

by B. Skanthakumar

The author, who lives in Britain, is a regular contributor to *Socialist Outlook*, publication of the British section of the Fourth International, to *International Viewpoint*, monthly publication of the Fourth International, and to *BIDOM*.

How loud those rumblings in the belly of the tiger have been! South Korean workers will be back on general strike on February 28. Unless the government relents on its new labor law.

The ruling New Korea Party has been under pressure at home and abroad to overhaul the industrial relations framework — an integral component of the postwar settlement and South Korea's industrialization strategy. This is the underside of the "East Asian Miracle." The longest working hours in the world — an average of 48.7 hours a week but usually up to an additional ten hours overtime. The highest rate of industrial accidents in the world — 1,660 deaths and 142,088 injuries a year in the late 1980s. Women's wages half that of men. Police and management goons used to bust up union meetings and protests. Only 12.7 percent of the work force unionized. Radical movements and even ideas criminalized.

The illegal Korean Confederation of Trade Unions (Minjunochong) had been campaigning for the overtly pro-employer reforms to be balanced by at least acceptance of union pluralism in the workplace and the right for teachers and civil servants to form and join unions.

While the government has conceded to union pluralism, this only takes effect three years from now, whereas the anti-labor provisions have immediate application. As unions well know, the government won't implement the right to organize even then.

Under existing law there can be only one union per workplace and only the pro-government Federation of Korean Trade Unions (Nochong) is legally recognized. The FKTU is seen as a puppet of management and indeed many companies have collaborated with the FKTU to form an enterprise union first to pre-empt the KCTU from registering one.

Business groups, particularly the Korea Employers Federation (KEF), had been pressing the regime to deregulate the labor market, by making it easier to hire and fire workers, sanctioning the use of scab labor during disputes, and allowing casualization.

Prime Minister Yi Su Song insisted "the new labor laws are not aimed at lowering wages, worsening working conditions, or helping restore the economy by permitting businesses to lay off employees en masse. They are laws legislated out of sincere agony to promote the interests of all — businesses, workers, and the entire people".

The problem is that no one believes him.

Korean workers know that it is they who will be doing the agonizing, and all because exports have to be priced "competitively" in the world

market. What democratic trade unionists want instead is:

- the right for more than one union to exist in the workplace — thus allowing the KCTU and its affiliates legal recognition.
- the right for civil servants and teachers to organize.
- the repeal of compulsory arbitration in a wide range of "essential services." (Unions haven't had lawful authority to take industrial action when in dispute.)
- the repeal of prohibition on third party involvement. Unions and unionists from other enterprises haven't been allowed to give support or advice in workplace disputes.
- lifting of the ban on trade union involvement in politics.
- a 40-hour working week.
- an end to the "variable working hours" system. This allows employers to determine the length of the working day and hours worked in the week so that it suits their production schedules and seasonal requirements without overtime pay.
- strict controls on and fair procedures for "redundancy dismissal."
- to stop the entrenched use of casual labor ("contingency work force") in the workplace.

The KCTU had been planning strike action since early December when it became apparent that the government would enact the proposed legislation without permitting at least full freedom of association.

However, they received an unexpected boost to their campaign through the government's own deceit and stupidity.

When most of Seoul was deep in slumber recovering from Christmas festivities, a special session of the legislature met on December 26 at 6 a.m. and within minutes rubber-stamped the passage of two laws — the Labor Law reforms and a draconian National Security Act.

The latter act is a frighteningly oppressive measure which gives the state more authority and easier grounds to spy on and imprison dissident and radical social movements. Opposition legislators, who make up 142 of the 299 member National Assembly, were not invited to this special sitting. The 500,000-strong KCTU called an immediate general strike demanding the law's immediate revocation.

This was the first general strike since 1948. There have been important strike movements in the 1980s and '90s — notably in 1987, when industrial action combined with popular protest to remove the military dictatorship of Chun Doo

Hwan and gave rise to an independent trade union movement. Nevertheless, those strikes had been confined to particular sectors and cities.

This has changed in the December events.

Role of FKTU

Meanwhile the FKTU, with its official membership of 1.2 million, surprised everyone by declaring that it too would go on strike, though separately from the KCTU at that stage. Even the most servile union leaderships occasionally act militant to preserve their credibility among their membership. Here there was pressure from the base to join in the action. However, true to its nature, the FKTU leadership soon changed its mind and called for limited walkouts instead of indefinite strike action.

It was workers in auto plants and ship yards who took the lead, shutting down the chaebols, or conglomerates owned by a few super-wealthy families, which dominate the economy. One of the chaebols, the giant Hyundai conglomerate, estimates losses in production from the first three days of strikes at US\$ 473 million.

Health workers, transport workers, the non-unionized workers, and students joined in demonstrations and rallies. Over 200,000 workers were on strike and tens of thousands more were taking unofficial action.

This first phase of strikes lasted until New Year's Eve.

Maintaining Alliances

The KCTU has been working to a risky plan. It needs to cause maximum disruption to the chaebols and the government, but it also needs to retain and extend the alliances it has made with the people who have taken to the streets in solidarity with what they perceive as the unfairness of the legislation and the arrogance of the government.

Meanwhile, it knows that it cannot prolong a general strike without losing even its core supporters. So it has tried to vary the tempo and intensity of action.

Strikes, walkouts, in-house meetings, rallies, demonstrations, mass signature campaigns have been used. Strikes take place at staggered intervals, allowing those exhausted or wavering to resume work and be replaced by others groups of workers. President Kim Young Sam's administration was using every dirty trick in its book to turn public support away from the strikers. Outrageously it was suggested that the KCTU were North Korean agents, and unsuccessful attempts were made to whip up anti-Communist hysteria.

The second phase of the strike began on January 3 with an emphasis on the participation

of public sector workers, including from state broadcasting and other white collar unions. It was interesting to see that the banking and finance sector were solidly behind the strikes with daily walkouts. In disgust at its official leadership's abstention from strike action, at least 37 enterprise unions have disaffiliated from the KFTU, and most will join the KCTU.

Again with an eye on public support and sympathy, the KCTU suspended strike action on the subway when cold weather and heavy snow closed up roads and made travel difficult. Cars were serviced free at selected check-up points around the country. Strikers went to rural villages to help clear snow, which had trapped some communities, and others participated in environmental campaigns in urban areas.

Similarly when health workers at 24 leading hospitals went on strike, the union arranged that emergency services and intensive care units were staffed by union members.

The deeply conservative media were deprived of reasons to blame strikers for avoidable deaths and public distress.

Threat of Arrests

Threats to the personal safety of the KCTU leadership became more openly voiced. Arrest warrants were issued against twenty of them at first — and later many more — including union president Kwon Young Gil. By then the union leaders had sought sanctuary on the grounds of the Roman Catholic Myongdong Cathedral, knowing that their headquarters would be raided and they imprisoned if found.

No fewer than 1,300 riot police ringed the cathedral to prevent the physical movement of the strike leaders and others from joining them there. The Myongdong Cathedral itself became a focal point for press conferences, rallies, and demonstrations in solidarity with those besieged inside. [See accompanying interview on conditions in and around Myongdong Cathedral.]

Worker militants elsewhere have been arrested, and their immediate release must be one of the priorities of the international solidarity movement.

Third Phase of Strike Movement

The strike movement entered a third phase on January 15. The KFTU president visited the KCTU leaders at the cathedral and issued a joint statement confirming that this was a common struggle in which they shared identical demands. By now record numbers were participating in the strike — over 350,000 members of the KCTU and over 370,000 members of the KFTU, according to Labor Ministry figures.

On January 17 the general strike was suspended. Instead, one-day workplace walkouts every Wednesday combined with mass rallies and demonstrations every Wednesday and Saturday were advocated by the leadership. The

walkouts too were discontinued on January 28, when the leadership of the KCTU said it was concentrating on preparing for a nationwide general strike if the labor laws were not rescinded by February 28.

Here the KCTU was responding to the fact that union members in heavy industry were returning to work, partly in response to pleas from the management. Many see their struggle as against an unjust state-sponsored law and not against the chaebol-state as a whole.

Indeed, Hyundai car workers, among the most militant section, not only returned to work but on top of working on Saturday, voluntarily worked through the night and into Sunday morning to compensate for loss of production during the strike!

One union representative said this was in return for the management not seeking financial compensation from the union for losses incurred, as other companies had threatened to do.

Society-Wide Revolt

Anger and activism is now unfolding on the terrain of civil society. Professional groups, women's organizations, the radical student movement, and the parliamentary opposition are more prominent in this society-wide revolt against government authoritarianism.

The bumper stickers on cars say it all. "We hate civilian dictatorship." In 1987 it was people's power that led to the transition from a military dictatorship to a quasi-civilian one under former general Roh Tae Woo. The working class created its own independent unions through that upsurge. The government and employers refused to recognize them then, but have had to bargain with them anyway.

When former oppositionist Kim Young Sam was elected many thought that South Korea had made the transition to democracy. He disappointed them by allying with the same business and military elites that had ruled through his predecessors.

The current parliamentary opposition, the National Congress of New Politics and the smaller United Liberal Democrats, are now leading a petition campaign against the labor laws.

The campaign aims to collect ten million signatures (one quarter of the population) demanding talks between the government and the opposition and for rewriting of the labor laws.

Independent Workers Party Needed

Presidential elections are due this year. Relations between the parliamentary parties are at an all-time low. From the viewpoint of the opposition parties, there are votes in the current protest and the opportunity to embarrass the ruling party.

There have been debates within the KCTU on labor's electoral strategy too. Some favor supporting the opposition candidates most sym-

pathetic to organized labor. Others believe that the ruling party will get its candidate in, unless there is a joint opposition candidate who doesn't split the anti-government vote. A third view is that the KCTU ought to stand a candidate of its own.

This last option we hope will gain greater support in the months ahead. It could be the basis for a party genuinely committed to workers rights, and representative of poor farmers as well, a party which could break the chaebol state apart. South Koreans yearn for an end to dictatorship, for genuine independence, including the closure of U.S. military bases and for the peaceful reunification of the peninsula. Only a mass workers party can deliver this.

A New Asian Example

British [and American] workers have been lectured for years now that they have to learn from the East Asian example. The key to economic growth and job security is "working smarter," non-unionized workplaces, flexible labor markets, etc., we are told. We need to compete against them, it is said, and so we must learn from them.

Workers in Western Europe and North America are told to accept lower wages, speedup, worse conditions, fewer jobs and benefits in order to "compete" with Asian workers. Now Korean workers, who have managed to wrest some improvements from their bosses over the last ten years, are told they have to accept less — in order to compete with foreign workers.

International working class solidarity is obviously the only answer to this shell game of the capitalists.

How interesting it is that South Korea's President Kim Young Sam blames "globalization" (seggyehwa) as justification for his new labor laws. Britain's industrial relations legislation is his model. Margaret Thatcher's confrontation with organized labor is his inspiration.

Well, here is something else we can learn from East Asian workers: "The world cannot be changed by some resolution of some politician, but by the power of the people." What a magnificent display of working class power we have witnessed!

Marx said that capitalism inevitably produces its own grave digger: the working class. Many critics of Marxism have claimed that the working class accepts capitalism, even in its "globalized" form, that the workers' lot is improving under capitalism, that they have no interest in taking on the historic mission of burying capitalism.

The South Korean events show that the grave digger isn't dead after all. It has only to discover its historic role. □

February 1, 1997

A Malaysian Unionist's Account

The Workers Movement in Malaysia Today

Interview with Arioka Dass

In the following interview, B. Skanthakumar talks with veteran trade union leader Arioka Dass about the workers' movement in Malaysia today.

*Arioka Dass has been an active trade unionist for most of his life. He is the author of *Not Beyond Repair* (Asia Monitor Resource Centre, Hong Kong: 1991), a historical and analytical overview of the Malaysian labor movement uncovering its origins and evolution.*

Dass was imprisoned for fifteen months under the infamous Internal Security Act following sweeping arrests in 1987 and subsequently released without charge. He was for many years a leader of the Transport Equipment and Allied Industries Employees Union and is now engaged in worker education projects.

Arioka Dass: The contemporary trade union movement mainly consists of the Malaysian Trades Union Congress (MTUC) initially called the Malaysian Trades Union Council. It was formed in the early 1950s in line with the colonial strategy to negate the progressive trade union movement then in existence. The purpose of the MTUC being to co-opt a group of trade union leaders and form the Council on an anti-Communist ideological basis.

The move was spearheaded by John Brazier, who was attached to the Ministry of Labour and a former British Trades Union Congress official sent to Malaya (as it then was called) to smash the existing trade union movement. The background to this is the anti-colonial struggle which was led by progressive forces, including the Malayan Communist Party and trade unionists outside later MTUC circles. This movement was forced to go underground and then crushed during the "emergency period" (1948-1960).

In its place, to give a semblance of trade union representation in the state legislature, Brazier wanted English-speaking unionists to be co-opted into his sphere of influence, which happened with the formation of the MTUC in 1950. The MTUC, though acting as a trade union center, is not recognized as such by law, but has been registered under the Societies Act and is unable to function as a genuine trade union center. One of the conditions behind the formation of the MTUC was to ensure that it did not participate in strikes. This being a weapon of the working class.

Prior to the "emergency period" the unions were influenced by the Communist Party and were general unions, catering to all working people instead of being divided as at present along craft and skills lines. This was a good start to the working class movement despite the lack of development of industries. Especially so because the plantation industry was the country's main revenue earner and very important to the colonial government's accumulation strategy.

At that point the plantation movement was left-wing and took up not only economic ques-

tions but also social issues affecting the migrant workers, then principally from India and China. The colonialists contained the workers on estates, not allowing them to develop links with other sections of the working class. They also diverted the Chinese workers by addicting them to opium smoking and likewise Indians to toddy (an alcoholic palm drink). Conditions on plantations were very bad — to the extent that the trade union movement grew stronger because of the real objective conditions there.

Q.: What about the present union movement?

A.: The unions formed by the British after smashing the progressive movement still linger on. In the vacuum left by the arrest and deportation of left-wing trade unionists, the co-opted leaders stepped in, and their influence remains strong today.

Another mechanism used by the colonialists was to make union recognition consequent upon registration with state authorities, principally the then office of the Registrar of Trades Unions. Thus the state could allow or disallow unions on the basis of its own designs. The leading federation of unions was under the influence of leftists and had 300,000 members. It was to be expected that the Pan-Malayan Federation of Trades Unions (PMFTU) was not registered.

To this day, unions have to conform to regulations decreed by the director-general of trade unions under the 1959 Trade Unions Act. When the MTUC was formed the leaders were more interested in claiming to represent labor in the legislature than in organizing workers in the emerging industries. Some of these union bureaucrats believed unions should go into business forming enterprises.¹

Unions are very bureaucratized. General secretaries of unions can decide on any matter without going to the membership. They can invest in buildings and then sell them or take kickbacks for renting them out to particular individuals or concerns. The biggest union to-

day, the National Union of Plantation Workers, which owned its own union office and even built a hostel for students from the estates to live in when they came to the city, has sold those properties, and the money was used to pay off the debts and wages of the bureaucracy.

Instead of investing membership subscriptions on ill-thought-out schemes, they could have spent these huge sums on educating and training shop floor workers about democratic trade unionism and participating in the affairs of their union and the movement.

Q.: So what accounts for the tensions that have emerged in recent years between the MTUC and the Malaysian government?

A.: In the late 1950s and '60s some of these leaders participated in elections on the Labour Party ticket. The government was unhappy with what they regarded as union involvement in politics. As industrial development gathered pace, the government passed legislation, like the 1967 Industrial Relations Act, to curb the trade union movement.

This was not because the trade union movement was militant or for that matter democratic. It was just that the state could not stand working class interests being represented. They wanted a free hand to carry out the "New Economic Policy," which was introduced after communal tensions exploded in May 1969.

This dissatisfaction with the MTUC has continued in the 1990s with the formation of the Malaysian Labour Organisation with the blessings of the government, because at that point some MTUC leaders were voicing discontent internationally at the refusal of the state to allow the formation of a National Union of Electronics Workers.

There were also disputes between the two organizations over which one ought to represent workers interests on tripartite bodies like the Employment Provident Fund (EPF) Board and on international bodies, such as the International Labour Organisation. The government

1. The National Union of Bank Employees recently sold its head-office building and has earmarked half the proceeds to develop an eco-tourist theme park. Other unions are involved in real estate deals with land developers. These businesses have all collapsed because these union leaders wanted a career for themselves as directors of corporate bodies.

We're All in the Same Global Boat There's only one way to keep it from sinking. Bring up the bottom.

These excerpts are from an article in the February 1997 issue of the AFL-CIO's new monthly publication America @ Work. The headlines have not been changed but subheads have been added. William Greider's new book is One World, Ready or Not: The Manic Logic of Global Capitalism (Simon & Schuster).

At an industrial zone outside Kuala Lumpur, capital of Malaysia...[as] shifts changed at the Motorola factory, dozens of delicate young Malay women, wearing the chaste veils of their Muslim heritage, streamed into the changing room. When they emerged a few moments later, they looked like space-age explorers — dressed in silken jump suits, their heads cloaked by white bonnets and surgical masks, ready to perform the exacting task of assembling semiconductor chips....

Malaysia: "No Unions"

When the U.S. semiconductor industry decided to make Malaysia its largest offshore assembly base, the companies struck an explicit deal with the [Malaysian] government: *no unions*. That was nearly 25 years ago. When the Malaysian government considered lifting the ban, some American companies issued a blunt warning: if you allow electronics workers to form independent trade unions, we're moving our factories elsewhere — perhaps to Indonesia or China, where free trade unions are brutally suppressed. The government backed down...

[For more on the conditions workers face in Malaysia, see the interview with Malaysian unionist Arioka Dass, elsewhere in this issue of *BIDOM*. Also see Carol McAllister's first-hand description of the impact of "globalization" on young Malaysian women in an issue of *BIDOM* in 1993.]

Indonesia: Labor Suppressed

In Indonesia, I went to interview the leader of a new independent — and illegal — labor federation, but when I got to the union's shabby headquarters on a back alley of Jakarta, Muchtar Pakpahan wasn't there. He had been arrested the night before. Pakpahan is now charged with treason, facing a possible death sentence. His crime? Asserting the right to organize workers in their own self-interest.

[See sidebar "More on Muchtar Pakpahan" on next page.]

The global economy, described as free trade, is free...for everyone except workers.

American Workers' Stake

American workers have a direct stake in the lives of these other people, however strange and distant they may seem. The depressed wages in America and the mass unemployment in Europe, even the hollowing out of Japanese manufacturing, are all directly driven by the absence of labor rights in many developing countries.

Until exploited workers elsewhere have the ability to bargain up their own wages, the downdraft on U.S. prosperity will continue. So will deindustrialization. The political goal must be: bring up the bottom, as rapidly as possible, instead of pulling the top down...

Needed: A Worldwide Minimum Wage

The question of human rights, in other words, is an economic issue. The global system has bountiful production — what it lacks are consumers, workers with incomes ample

enough to buy all of the goods the world can now produce...

Staggering surpluses in productive capacity stalk the global auto industry, aircraft, chemicals, steel, tires, consumer electronics, drugs and other sectors. Too many goods, too few buyers. More factories must be closed somewhere. That is the knife-edge threatening everyone's security.

The system's boosters generally [argue] ...that globalization is rescuing millions of peasants from muddy poverty — so don't interfere. But, if the workers in poorer countries are so happy with their situation, why do they stage so many strikes? The American press seldom reports on this, but there are hundreds, even thousands of wildcat strikes across developing Asia and elsewhere.

Their Fight Is Our Fight

Their struggles are often put down by military force, arrests and official violence. Some brave workers — recklessly brave, I think — even try to start free trade unions in China. The penalty there is many years in prison or perhaps death.

My message to Americans at work is this: their fight is your fight. An infant labor movement is struggling to be born in poor nations on the other end of the global economy. It desperately needs help from workers and unions in wealthier countries. You should rally to their cause because it is the right thing to do, but also because it is in your own economic self-interest.

— William Greider

nominated the MLO rather than the more representative MTUC.

Q: How do you explain the recent decision of the MLO to dissolve itself and to join the MTUC?

A.: The existence of the MLO and its close relationship with the government began to embarrass all involved because the MTUC had supporters abroad in the international trade union secretariats and even in the ILO who raised the issue of proper representation of workers. Locally MLO leaders came out openly in support of employers' interests — for example, when it opposed the raising of the employers EPF levy from 10 percent to 12 percent. This cast them in a bad light.

Minister for Human Resources Lim Ah Leky has been the midwife of the unification of the two labor centers — the pro-government MLO

and the apolitical MTUC. My own view is that this move will shift the entire labor movement to the right, making it more conservative than before. The union leadership will be pro-government and whatever semblance of independence it had will disappear, making the MTUC leaders yes-men for the government.

There is so much corruption within both these organizations that the government can use the information it has to keep the leadership in line. The current president of the MTUC, Zainal Rampak, has corruption charges pending against him in the courts of law. This is a card the government is holding against him. Instead of prosecuting him, recent statements suggest, the government will let Rampak off the hook if he repays the embezzled sums. All these practices and moves are part of the attempt to negate democratic trade unionism and to render the movement subservient to capital and the state.

Q: The economy has been booming and the official labor leadership has declared its support and participation in Prime Minister Mahathir Mohammad's Vision 2020 scheme of making Malaysia a fully developed nation by 2020 AD. On the economic front there is a growth rate of 8 percent per annum, sometimes 10 percent, but how are the workers benefiting from it?

A: Even with this growth rate the government wants to further curtail basic labor standards. The government has come up with this concept of "Malaysia Inc.," of unions being social partners along with capital and the state.

How can labor be a partner when it doesn't have equal rights and is repressed through laws like the Internal Security Act, Trade Unions Act, Industrial Relations Act, and Police Act,

which curb the development of an independent, democratic trade union movement? The working class needs to be freed of these laws and the system that underpins it before there can be genuine development of this country.

Another ruse of the government to stifle an independent movement was the formation of enterprise, or in-house, unions [company unions] modeled on those in Japan. This was done under the prime minister's "Look East" policy of basing economic development on the Japanese and East Asian experience instead of following Western prescriptions.

The majority of the trade unions in Malaysia (around 55 percent now) are in-house unions formed by employers. Some of the unionists involved are genuinely interested in their members' welfare but are frustrated by their lack of experience and isolation from the rest of the movement. The MTUC is not addressing this real need for its services.

Workers in the Semiconductor Industry

Q: The frustration of attempts to unionize electronics workers, mainly in foreign-owned factories in Free Trade Zones and other places, has been an issue raised internationally by labor activists. What can you tell us about that?

A: Malaysia is the world's largest exporter of semiconductors, and there are 200,000 workers in the electronics industry. There has been no transfer of technology in these industries, and there was an assurance given to the investors that unions would not be formed there.

There have been attempts over the last twenty years by workers in these factories to organize themselves into in-house unions, but they have all been smashed. A celebrated case is that of the RCA Harris Workers Union, but these unionists have now won their industrial court action and will be reporting back for work on October 1 and will begin their unionization drive again. The government calls industries like these "sunset" ones, because they have outlived their usefulness in assembly, and the new policy is to prioritize hi-tech. When this happens there will be further objections to the formation of unions.

What is interesting here is that although the MTUC knows that the government will not approve registration of a National Union of Electronics Workers, it still keeps pressing this demand. The government has conceded the possibility of forming state-based unions.² But the MTUC has not pursued this option.

Here is another example. There are 200,000 workers in the textiles industry, and when there were moves to form a state-based textile work-

ers union, the MTUC objected strongly. What the MTUC ought to be doing is to first organize workers on this basis and later form a national federation of such unions. The MTUC rationale is that in-house unions are not effective. Of course they are not effective because they are employer-based, but in the RCA Harris case, with good leadership we found that they could sustain a struggle for recognition over six years. This is something remarkable given the kind of conditions we are living in.

So we should evaluate this question of in-house unions on a case by case basis rather than adopting a general policy.

Ethnic Divisions

Q: Malaysia is a society where ethnic politics and identity³ determine virtually every aspect of life and even have an institutionalized role. In this situation, how has the multi-ethnic labor movement fared?

A: We have in Malaysia today a young Malay working class, men and women, who in some instances are 70-80 percent of the work force, whereas we find the leadership particularly in the private sector is largely of Indian origin. This gives the employer and the government the possibility of using ethnic divisions and tensions to criticize the Malay workers for following Indians, who are labeled as troublemakers. Of course Indians are not inherently troublemakers; it is by virtue of their location in pro-

duction, and in the plantation industry, that the trade union movement is dominated by those of Indian descent.

This is also a reflection of historical factors, including the struggles of the Indian working class. In our society the problem of ethnic politics and tensions rears its ugly head every time it suits the purposes of those in power. However, the very fact that Indians are elected by Malay workers to represent them shows that ethnicity is not always a barrier to workers unity.

The labor movement is the only part of Malaysian society where ethnic politics is not the determining consideration. And the hope for us to build a unified country not through legislation but through struggle is the trade union movement. That is why we need to build a movement that is independent of the government, the employers, and the political parties, so that it will be free to articulate the best interests of the working class.

In 1994 in the run-up to elections for the MTUC executive, workers from the public and private sectors committed to democratic practices and the vision I have outlined above, combined to form a group called the Third Force. This group won most posts excepting the most powerful ones, those of president and general secretary, which were only narrowly lost. Now with this new merger of the union federations, the balance of power will shift to the right. However, the Third Force is committed to putting up a fight. *Continued on page 36*

More on Mughtar Pakpahan

Labor Leader Faces Firing Squad in Indonesia

The following is from the March 1997 issue of Labor Notes, p. 6. We have used the spelling "Pakpahan," rather than "Pakpan," as both forms have been used in print.

Indonesian labor leader Mughtar Pakpahan has been arrested for alleged subversion, a crime punishable by firing squad. Pakpahan is general chairman of the independent trade union Serikat Buruh Sejahtera Indonesia. His arrest followed political unrest in Jakarta last July.

The AFL-CIO has initiated a campaign to save the labor activist's life.

In 1992 Pakpahan founded an independent union, which the state-controlled trade union movement did not welcome. The union initially represented only 100 workers, but has since attracted almost 250,000, indicating workers' overwhelming support for independent democratic and representative unions.

The government continually targets leaders like Pakpahan. He was arrested in 1994 for allegedly inciting violence during massive worker demonstrations.

The AFL-CIO says that Pakpahan's imprisonment is based on false accusations and that this trial is unfair. Pakpahan's supporters claim the government has coerced false testimony, and that his imprisonment has affected his health.

Pakpahan is expected to be sentenced by April. The AFL-CIO calls for pressure on the Indonesian Ambassador in Washington to demand the release of Mughtar Pakpahan and an end to Indonesia's labor and human rights violations.

Letters can be sent to: Ambassador Arifin M. Siregar, Embassy of Indonesia, 2020 Massachusetts Avenue NW, Washington, D.C., 20066. Additional information is available from the AFL-CIO International Affairs Department, 815 16th Street NW, Washington, D.C., 20006.

— Reprinted from *Labor Notes*

2. Malaysia is a federation of thirteen states and two federal territories.

3. Ethnic composition is estimated at 60% Malay and indigenous peoples; 27% Chinese; and 8% Indian — the remainder being smaller communities. The main constituents in the Barisan Nasional (National Front) coalition which has ruled since de-colonization in 1957 are ethnic Malay, Chinese, and Indian parties. Ethnic quotas to favor Malays are government policy.

Protest London's Brutal Treatment of Pregnant Irish Activist

Press Release from Irish Northern Aid

The following press release, dated February 28, was posted on an IGC computer network conference on March 2.

Irish Northern Aid Committee
National Office: 363 Seventh Avenue, Suite
405, New York, N.Y. 10001 212-736-1916 *1-
800-IRELAND * 212-279-1916 (FAX)

Date: February 28, 1997

Contact: Christy Ward, National Press Relations Officer 614-344-9651 (day/eve) 614-344-2819 (FAX) 614-328-1516 (pager) cbhaird@nextek.net

Irish Americans are becoming increasingly alarmed over the continued incarceration without charge of Irish nationalist Roisin McAliskey by the British government in London's Holloway Prison.

Despite a growing condemnation of the British government's refusal to grant her bail and increased support for McAliskey — including a letter of support from a number of American celebrities and urgent appeals from Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and civil liberty groups in Ireland and Britain — the British still refuse to take positive action to resolve this issue.

Protests on International Women's Day

Rosaleen Doherty, director of the POW department of the Irish Northern Aid Committee, has issued the following fact sheet on McAliskey's case in conjunction with International Women's Day, which is March 8:

- Roisin McAliskey, 25, is nearly eight months pregnant and weighs less than 95 pounds.
- Since November 20, 1996, she has been in a British prison.
- The British claim she has knowledge of an IRA attack on a British Army barracks in Osnabruck, Germany, that took place in June 1996.

- She has denied any knowledge of the attack.
 - She has not been charged with any crime.
 - The British government refuses to grant her bail.
 - The German government refuses to act in her favor and has opposed bail.
 - She will likely be shackled when she gives birth in jail.
 - The British government has told her mother, civil rights activist and former British MP Bernadette Devlin McAliskey, that she will not be allowed to attend the birth of her first grandchild.
 - Mother and child will be separated after birth.
 - Roisin suffers from asthma and rheumatism, is underweight and in poor health.
 - She is being held in solitary confinement in Holloway Prison outside London.
 - She is not permitted in prison common areas and has no contact with other prisoners.
 - She is classified a "Category A" prisoner, at high risk of escape.
 - She does not have access to adequate medical care.
 - She is strip-searched twice a day, despite the fact that she has no contact with other prisoners.
 - Her family may visit her only once every two weeks.
 - There is a partition between her and family members when they meet.
 - During visits, she may not touch family members.
 - She is not permitted visits from anyone outside her family other than her attorney.
 - Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and civil liberties groups in Ireland and Britain have voiced concern over her condition.
 - The European Parliament has expressed concern over her situation and plans on sending a delegation to meet with her.
 - At the time of her arrest, she was a community activist and a former student at Queen's University, Belfast.
 - She has no prior record of involvement with any paramilitary organization.
 - At the age of nine, she witnessed a loyalist death squad attack on her mother and father inside their home in Coalisland, Ireland, that nearly killed them both.
 - Irish Deputy Prime Minister Dick Spring has filed an appeal with the British House of Lords in an effort to seek bail for Roisin.
 - American celebrities, including Ellen Burstyn, June Jordan, Gloria Steinem, Jennifer Harbury, and Manhattan Borough President Ruth Messinger have signed an open letter to Bernadette Devlin McAliskey in support of Roisin.
 - Activists around the world have protested in front of British and German embassies to draw attention to Roisin's plight.
 - Representatives of a number of Irish American organizations met with the German Consul General in Washington, D.C., last November regarding the treatment of Roisin.
 - Her next hearing is scheduled for March 12.
 - Demonstrations are planned in Washington, D.C., and New York, for International Women's Day, March 8, in support of Roisin.
- The New York-based Irish Northern Aid Committee, founded in 1971, is a non-profit, humanitarian organization which raises funds for the families of Irish political prisoners in British, Irish and American jails. □

Building the Labor Party in the USA

by Frank Lovell

Efforts to create a labor party in the United States go back to the 19th century. None succeeded. The most promising beginning has been made only recently, at the June 1996 founding convention of the Labor Party in Cleveland, Ohio, attended by nearly 2,000 delegates and visitors. Since then the party has continued to grow, undisturbed by the noise of the presidential campaign. But it remains fragile, having as yet secured the formal endorsement of only a narrow sector of organized labor (about 10 percent).

For the Labor Party to prosper, its organizers and proponents in the major unions that have sponsored it, as well as its active members in the 40-odd chapters that are meeting in a chapter convention on March 15-16 in Newark, NJ, must project a vision of what the party can become and what it can accomplish. Whether that will happen at this chapter convention is by no means assured. Neither is there any reason to believe that the future of the labor Party hangs on the outcome of decisions taken at the chapter convention.

A complicating factor within some chapters is an insistent outcry by some that the restriction against running Labor Party candidates in any elections for public office, imposed by the party's founding convention and effective until the next national convention some time in 1998, be eased somewhat so as to allow chapters to field local candidates when favorable opportunities arise.

The debate over this issue has become abrasive in some chapters, exacerbated by a loose caucus formation which circulates a publication called *Labor Party News and Discussion Bulletin*, edited in Madison, Wisconsin, with contributors around the country. This constitutes an anti-leadership network haranguing the Interim National Council to authorize local election campaigns or initiate measures to prepare for local election campaigns. An example of the type of article that characterizes this factional publication appears elsewhere in this issue of *Bulletin in Defense of Marxism* by our comrade and longtime collaborator Ben Stone.

Abrasive Debates

In some chapters debate over electoral politics (an abstract matter at this stage) has become so abrasive and verbally abusive that union members who were attracted to the labor party idea soon became discouraged by long, inconclusive meetings. In at least one instance an effort was made by union members to dissolve the chapter, according to a report from Central New Jersey that appeared in the candidates-now discussion bulletin (volume 2, no. 1, January 1997). This kind of debate resolves nothing and leads nowhere. But it will be resolved in one way or another by the chapter convention, either by fiat of the Interim National Council (whose authority derives from the founding convention), or by a thorough discussion among delegates, which can be educational and in this way may serve a useful party-building purpose.

Only a beginning can be made along these lines at this convention, but such a beginning can help secure party stability. Many basic questions may arise in the course of a sober discussion. What are the lessons of history on the labor party question in the U.S., going back more than a century? Is any of this history relevant today? What is the labor party goal? And what can it accomplish

in the political situation now developing? How will the labor party be organized? And who will control it?

These are legitimate questions that may not be considered germane by delegates coming to a brief two-day convention and anxious to get on with the urgent tasks of the moment. But this particular moment in U.S. politics provides an opportunity for Labor Party activists to take stock of where they are and decide what must be done. That fact ought to be recognized.

With that in mind, this first chapter convention can be expected to settle on the course charted by the Interim National Council and begin working seriously on gathering signatures to the petition for a constitutional amendment to guarantee jobs at living wages. This can be a rewarding project, opening new avenues of party building.

The unique character of this nascent labor party does not preclude serious study of the labor party question in U.S. history, nor does it rule out review from time to time of the five-year organizing effort by the Oil, Chemical, and Atomic Workers International Union (OCAW) to gather the necessary human and material resources to hold the party's founding convention. History cannot be expected to provide answers to all questions. But some incidents from the past may offer clues to a better understanding of the present.

The Labor Party Attempt in the 1920s

Only once before in our century has an appreciable sector of organized labor shown much interest in helping to organize a labor party. That was back in the 1920s. The world then was very different from our post-World War II world today. But there were some similar aspects. In the 1920s the working class was repressed and the unions were under attack. Wages were stagnant. The employers were jubilant, enjoying economic prosperity after World War I. The stock market was on the rise, attracting new investors that hardly knew the market existed before the great boom of that time.

In 1923 an influential sector of the old AFL, the Chicago Federation of Labor, under the leadership of John Fitzpatrick, a progressive union bureaucrat, had endorsed the labor party idea and was collaborating with the leadership of the newly created Workers (Communist) Party to make the idea a flesh-and-blood reality. It never happened, partly because of inexperience and ineptness in the leadership of the Communist faction. They alienated Fitzpatrick and other progressives in the union bureaucracy and then tried to set up the largely fictitious "Federated Farmer-Labor Party."

William Z. Foster, a leading Communist and outstanding union organizer, leader of the great 1919 steel strike, reflected soon after on the 1923 labor party fiasco and what contributed to it. He confided at the time to James P. Cannon, another top leader of the Communist movement in those days, that "when people who all want the same thing get together in a closed room they tend to see what they want to see and they can talk themselves into almost anything." Foster said, "I got carried away myself and was convinced against my will and better judgment." (James P. Cannon, *The First Ten Years of American Communism*, p. 87.)

Foster's observation of self-deception might be useful to some present-day Labor Party activists who have talked each other into

believing that the Labor Party's future depends on electoral activity now, without further delay.

The British Labour Party

An example of some problems arising once labor party candidates are elected can be taken from another country — Britain. Conflicting aspects of British Labour Party history are often cited to explain how a working-class party in an industrialized capitalist society can be created, also to warn against what such a party can become. Little of this is relevant to the problems of the U.S. labor movement today and to the present efforts to build a labor party in this country. But the British example may be thought-provoking (if nothing more) in trying to understand the debate over whether this nascent labor party should field candidates at the earliest possible opportunity as the best way to build the party.

After the surprise victory of the Labour Party in the 1945 British election, in the wake of World War II, and during the succeeding six years of the Attlee Labour government, the observation was sometimes made that the British party is three parties: the trades union party, the constituency party, and the parliamentary party. The unions tended to dictate party policy in domestic matters; the party branches mobilized the popular constituency vote; and the Labour Members of Parliament decided what was best in foreign policy and in maneuvering with the Tory opposition for control of government.

Historians may now look back on those early postwar years to discover that the seeds of degeneration were sewn by the parliamentary wing of the party, because the elected officials sought to protect and perpetuate their seats in government — and to administer the capitalist system *for* the employers — at the expense of working-class needs. The result has been the constant and continuous shift over the past quarter century of economic and political weight in favor of the employing class. In Britain the rich get richer and the poor get poorer, just as in the United States. This imbalance in the division of wealth is what the labor party in the U.S. seeks to correct.

A Review of LPA's History

A short review of the preparatory work and experience that brought the labor party from its embryonic stage to its present organizational structure may help us to understand what strategy is needed to strengthen the party and promote its further growth.

In 1989, the OCAW executive committee agreed to conduct a membership survey to discover the extent of labor party sentiment in that union. This showed a sizable majority favoring a labor party over the existing two-party system. The survey was extended to other unions with the same result. Encouraged by these findings the 1991 OCAW convention voted to launch a campaign for a labor party and set up an organization called Labor Party Advocates, consisting of volunteers who contributed at least \$20 each. This money was used to help maintain the organization and keep track of its growing numbers of supporters.

Tony Mazzocchi, who became LPA national organizer, toured the country explaining the extent of labor party sentiment that existed and urging unions to endorse the labor party idea. The newsletter *Labor Party Advocate* appeared and continued publication for the next five years. It kept labor party activists informed of the developing movement for a labor party around the country.

From the beginning LPA organizers tried to explain that their goal was to help create a labor party based on the union movement. They were firmly convinced that a viable labor party cannot be created unless and until sizable sectors of organized labor have officially subscribed to and endorsed the labor party idea, and

show a willingness to actively build such a party. The question then was how to galvanize labor party sentiment, organize union members politically, and mobilize them in political actions. This has remained the central question and continuing task even though the process is much further advanced than when LPA began the march. There was never any doubt that the millions-strong membership of organized labor cannot be reached without a serious effort to gain access through official channels.

Beginning of LPA Chapters

Early on, LPA chapters began to form. In Cleveland, LPA began with the support of several local union officials and others closely related to the union movement. This was the nucleus of what may have been the first LPA chapter. It grew slowly with the recruitment of new members who were not in unions and some rank-and-file unionists. They soon realized that they needed to announce their presence and become better known to the local unions. They organized recruitment meetings and continued discussions with progressive union officials, and in December 1992 managed to help organize an educational conference in Detroit in collaboration with the Detroit LPA chapter.

In Detroit LPA had the support and active participation in public activities of the secretary of Ford UAW Local 600. In Cleveland the president of the large AFSCME local there was one of the mainstays of the LPA chapter. With these recognized official union leaders as organizers and scheduled speakers at the Detroit Educational Conference, other prominent union officials agreed to participate and prepare talks, including James Gibbs, an African American strike leader and elected officer of the United Mine Workers. This early area conference drew a modest 200 participants, but it was larger and more informative and attracted more attention among political activists than expected. Members of some radical groups in the Detroit area helped organize the conference and contributed to its success. (The texts of many of the talks given at that conference were published in this magazine in 1993 and after.)

In December 1994, the same group of Midwest LPA activists organized another area conference, this time in Toledo, Ohio. Over 300, mostly union activists, attended. Bob Wages, OCAW president, was the main speaker. Tony Mazzocchi was also there and spoke about LPA organizing efforts around the country. The Toledo daily newspaper, *The Blade*, ran a front-page story with extensive quotes from interviews with conference participants and from the talk by Wages. This was the first LPA event to command the attention of one of the corporate-owned mass papers in an American city.

The Toledo conference reflected LPA's growing strength and influence and the changing political climate. The rail unions' experience with bipartisan strike breaking had brought the Brotherhood of Maintenance of Way Employees into support of LPA. The way Clinton rammed NAFTA through Congress despite the opposition of most of organized labor taught many labor officials that an alternative to the Democrats was needed. Many labor officials were becoming fearful of the rightward trend and anti-labor legislation from a Republican-controlled Congress and an equally anti-labor Democratic Party.

In San Francisco the Central Labor Council endorsed the labor party idea, as did the Building Trades Council. On January 14, 1995, LPA organized a public hearing on the political situation and the need for labor action. This was held in the Carpenters Hall in Hayward, California, attended by more than 500. Many top union officials spoke in support of a labor party, including Jack Henning, head of the state AFL-CIO, Walter Johnson, president of the San Francisco labor council, Stan Smith, leader of the Building Trades

Council, and others. The February 1995 issue of *Labor Party Advocate* carried full accounts of this and other LPA activities. The March issue boasted that LPA was on the move in Colorado, California, Texas, Washington, New Jersey, Utah, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, Michigan, Illinois, New York, Montana, and Alabama... "and we're working on others," it said.

LPA Organizing Tools

Labor Party Advocate was LPA's main organizing tool, circulated nationally by most LPA chapters and by some local unions. At the beginning of 1996 it started its "big push for [the] founding convention," calling for the mobilization of all possible forces: "Everyone an Organizer." In addition to this, OCAW's educational department issued two valuable organizing manuals: "Speakers Training Workbook for Labor Party Advocates Activists" and "Manual for Labor Party Advocates and a Working People's Agenda." Both remain useful guides for workers education classes, and can still be effective tools for recruiting workers to labor party chapters.

The Labor Institute (an OCAW 8-149 project) issued a well-drafted study course, "Corporate Power and the American Dream," designed for use by local union education departments where they exist and function and by labor party chapters where feasible. The purpose being: "Toward an Economic Agenda for Working People."

This brief review of only a few highlights of the unflagging 5-year effort that made possible the 1996 birth of the Labor Party is a small measure of what had to be done. Without this it would not have happened. And surely the central organizers deserve credit, OCAW president Bob Wages and LPA director Tony Maz-zocchi especially. Since they were mainly responsible for the strategy that won official union endorsement, created LPA chapters, and brought the labor party into being, their strategy for strengthening and building this infant labor party (which excludes running labor party candidates for public office at this juncture) must be respected and carefully considered at the first convention of Labor Party chapters.

Educational Campaign Central to LP's Creation

Everything that was done to create the labor party was essentially an educational campaign. It began with consultation of workers to determine their attitudes on the idea of a labor party and proceeded to probe among unionists for responses, and it convinced a segment of the union bureaucracy that a labor party in this country is necessary. Since the founding convention the educational campaign has continued.

OCAW's educational department has produced an updated manual called *Labor Party Information and Organizing Manual: How to Mobilize Around the Labor Party Platform* (available from the Labor Party, PO Box 53177, Washington, D.C., 20009). In San Francisco in January a 3-day "train the trainers" session took place, out of which came 30 new trainers ready to present the "Corporate Power and the American Dream" workshop to unions, LP chapters, and community organizations as a way of building understanding and support for the Labor Party program.

And of course, four issues of the *Labor Party Press*, the official bimonthly publication of the Labor Party, have appeared. This is another valuable educational tool. In its January 1997 issue (volume 2, number 1) it exposed the bipartisan attack on Social Security, thus preparing Labor Party members to explain to neighbors and fellow workers the big lie that Social Security is going broke and can be saved only by investing its funds in the stock

market. This scheme, cooked up on Wall Street and endorsed by members of Congress in both parties, was aired in *Labor Party Press* long before it was reported and debated in the capitalist dailies.

The Right-to-a-Job Amendment Campaign

In the March issue, *Labor Party Press* announced the Labor Party's 28th Amendment Campaign: "Hi, I'm from the Labor Party. Would you like to sign this petition calling for a constitutional amendment to guarantee a living wage job?" (For a job as a right.) This is another form of the kind of educational campaign that launched the Labor Party, the campaign to reach out to workers and educate them on the need to act together in their own self-interest. There is logic to this campaign. It allows Labor Party activists to meet as many new workers as will sign the petition. Some will be interested in how well the campaign succeeds and may wonder why neither the Democrats nor the Republicans will have anything to do with it. The conclusion from this experience is that a labor party is needed for this and for many other working class needs.

It may be argued that a campaign for another amendment to the U.S. Constitution is not appealing to the "average worker," that it is better to find ways to explain that the Labor Party is different from the Democratic and Republican parties because it will represent the interests of the working class and be subject to the control of working people; therefore, it will be able to transform political control of production and guarantee jobs for all, along with much else. This does not necessarily contradict the logic of the constitutional amendment campaign. But its validity remains to be demonstrated. And proponents of the petition campaign can respond that theirs is a good way to begin the demonstration and test in action the underlying assumptions.

A resolution from the New York Metro chapter asserts that the constitutional amendment petition can have only limited use: to serve as a way of gathering names and addresses of voters in precincts where the Labor Party can be expected to field candidates and become a factor in the local electoral arena. The educational value of this is unstated because education is not a high priority in the Metro chapter. Comrade Ben Stone, a member of Metro, declares: "elections are not the only way to reach the working masses, but they are the best way." Of course a way must be found to reach the working masses with the labor party message if the party hopes to prosper. But to think that election campaigns are the "best way" is very one-sided.

The Continuing Clamor to Run Candidates Now

Whether all the fine points of polite debate will find expression at the Labor Party chapter convention is dubious. But this question of running Labor Party candidates for public office will. And the question of whether running candidates is useful — whether it is the best or possibly worst way to reach a mass audience — is pertinent. At least two considerations must be taken into account. The first is that working hard to put one of "our" people in public office (Democrat, Republican, or Labor Party) requires faith that the office seeker will help us (may actually solve some of our problems) if elected. This is an illusion. Workers need to mobilize themselves to solve their problems themselves, not rely on an elected candidate to do it for them.

The Labor Party should seek to dispel such illusions. One way to do this is through an educational campaign that explains why

Continued on page 25

Unions and Chapters in the Labor Party

by Rita Shaw and Brian King

Rita Shaw is past president of Transportation Communication Union Local 1380, interim vice chair of the Seattle Chapter, and representative from her affiliated union local to the Executive Committee of the Seattle Chapter. Brian King chairs the Outreach Committee of the Seattle Chapter and is a hospital worker whose workplace is yet to be organized.

The Labor Party was created with a general direction that represents a genuine consensus of its membership. That direction, put simply, is:

Build and organize a massive movement based upon the workers of this country and their existing organizations.

This workers' movement will:

- Engage in popular education about the growth of corporate power and its negative effects on workers' needs and rights.
- Redefine the meaning of "work" so that everybody who contributes to society can enjoy the benefits of having a decent and useful job.
- Change the basic focus of political discussion and elections to bring both into line with the hopes and dreams of working people.
- Organize this workers' movement to act in its own interests, independent of the corporations' political interests and their parties.

Since the founding convention in Cleveland, opinions voiced in the various bodies of the Labor Party on the relationship between chapters and unions seem to boil down to one of two views. Some people feel that the chapter formations are too troublesome to be useful. Others say that the chapters are O.K. and it's the unions that are too bureaucratic and conservative to really commit themselves to the goals stated above.

Unions and Chapters Both Working Together

Neither of these views is correct. In order to build the kind of Labor Party we all want to see, it's going to take *both* the unions and chapters, working together. We need the support and participation of organized labor, and we need a vibrant, committed network of community chapters covering the length and breadth of the country.

The endorsing/affiliated unions are the backbone of the Labor Party. They provide necessary institutional credibility and resources. It's hard to imagine how we could ever hope to create anything even approaching what the Labor Party is today, or intends to be in the future, without them. There cannot be a real Labor

Party that is not based on the organized labor movement.

One major contribution the unions make, that is sometimes overlooked by those railing against the leadership of the unions, is recruitment to the Labor Party of their own members. Without the active support of a union's membership, its endorsement/affiliation will not achieve the necessary impact of building a real organizational base for future activities. The supporting unions at this time are limited to a small sector of what is possible and needed. Addition of other major unions will be a long process. But it will happen if we are patient and persistent.

The chapters have an important, multifaceted role to play in building the movement, especially in this early formative period of organizing. While some endorsing unions are undertaking active campaigns to reach their membership with the Labor Party message, this is not true of all. Well-organized and focused chapters that have a core group of committed activists can perform a vital role in outreach and education of union members. The resulting organization of these Labor Party supporters will in turn lead to increasing support and commitment from their unions.

Chapters, especially in this early period of organizing, can also initiate activities to start reaching people who must work for a living, but are not part of the organized labor movement. This group represents a huge majority of workers, and importantly, most young working people. The ability of a chapter to organize effectively will not only increase its core of committed activists but will also present a cohesive public appearance and build the Labor Party. Uncommitted union organizations will be looking for this when determining what their relationship to the Labor Party will be.

While there is at present a relatively small degree of union support and involvement in chapter formations, the future possibility of unions and chapters working closely together to build the Labor Party is a goal to aim for. For now, chapters can provide the framework, support, and focused activities for members of unions that haven't become part of the Labor Party yet, and for workers who aren't yet in unions.

Organizing the Labor Party is not the sole responsibility of either unions or chapters. In order to be successful, it is necessary for the two basic ingredients to work together, unified and focused on our major national campaign. Then we'll have something cooking. □

Recipe for a Great Labor Party

Ingredients:

Labor Unions
Local Chapters, State & Regional groups
Mix of Other Organized Groups
(examples: Artists, Blacks, Latinos/Latinas, Religious, Youth, Welfare, Women)

Seasoning: Concerted Efforts, Focused National Campaign
Leavening: Bold Vision

Directions:

Start with the core base of organized labor union supporters. Add the local chapter, state and regional groups. (Note: There is no restriction on the quantity of any of the above.) Gather other organized support groups to be mixed with blended base. Seasonings may vary and reflect some differences in choice, but large doses of a focused national campaign is basic to the recipe.

Preparation time will be lengthy. Do not rush! Ingredients can be included as available. Seasoning is to be included and adjusted throughout the process. The mix does not improve with rest, and requires a healthy amount of bold vision to assure its rising to massive proportions.

Unforeseen events might occur that can speed the process, but this should not be counted on. Impatience or ill-advised short cuts may sour the base.

While each ingredient is very distinctive, when combined they work well together and should produce a movement that represents working class hopes and aspirations.

A Plan to Build the Labor Party in the Pittsburgh Area

by Paul Le Blanc

The following article reflects some of the thinking in one Labor Party chapter. This article was the basis for a recent discussion of perspectives in the Pittsburgh chapter, which was recognized by the LP's Interim National Council at its January meeting in San Francisco. The Pittsburgh chapter, as a result of the discussion based on this document, adopted a 6-month plan of action, including some of the practical proposals presented here.

Those of us who are committed to the Labor Party face a daunting task of building a new political party that will advance the interests of the majority of the people in the United States, the working-class, in the face of the power of big business, corporations, and politics-as-usual, eventually culminating in our winning the battle of democracy.

In order to be a serious factor in politics, it is necessary to have two things. We must first of all have a clear program regarding present-day problems and future goals, and on how to move from the one to the other. Without this, disorientation and disintegration will result. The Labor Party is fortunate to have the very strong beginnings of such a program, which we will be further developing and elaborating as the party continues to grow.

The second requirement for a serious political group is knowing what to do next. Otherwise hopes will be frustrated, energies and resources will be squandered, leading to organizational collapse. This has been the fate of all-too-many "third party" efforts in our recent history. It may be helpful, in developing a perspective on what to do next, to sketch roughly the different phases of development the party will need to go through in order to achieve its aims. Following from this, we can outline specific tasks for the present phase that we are in. It will then be possible to make specific proposals for Labor Party activity and structure in the six-month period of January-June 1997.

I. Four Phases of Labor Party Development

It is, first of all, important to recognize that reality is always far more complex than even the most sophisticated analysis, and that the following schematic outline of Labor Party development must be seen as only a rough approximation. As we go through the actual experience of party-building, we must be guided by the platform, our vision, and a medium-term plan like this one, but at the same time be prepared to revise judgments and timetables (sometimes things move slower or faster than expected). Still, it is possible to envision four phases of Labor Party development.

Phase One, stretching from approximately 1996 to 1998, involves building the party in a number of local areas — in our case, in the Pittsburgh area. There must, first of all, be the gathering of a critical mass of members that will be capable of beginning serious party-building. Related to this is the development of an activist membership. The members' activity will result in the vital accumulation of experience and knowledge necessary for the party to become a serious political force. Their activity will be made possible by (and will also help create) an organizational and resource infrastructure that are essential for further party development. If done properly, this activity involving educational outreach and modest, non-electoral political work will further build up the party's membership, its contacts and general milieu, and its influence in the working class, the labor movement, and the local political situation.

Phase Two, beginning in 1998, should see the expansion and deepening of educational outreach and non-electoral political work in a manner that is reflected in the party's increasingly mass influence on the local and regional level in various parts of the country. The growing membership and organizational strength, the growing experience and knowledge, the further elaboration of our political program, and the growing political influence of the Labor Party can be translated into the initiation of serious electoral work on the local level. The initial modesty of such beginning electoral efforts will help us to learn to develop electoral campaigns that are capable of winning — and that are capable of making a positive difference in the lives of working-class people as such victories are won.

Phase Three, perhaps encompassing the first decade of the next century, will involve sustained political struggles — electoral and non-electoral — on the local, statewide, and regional levels, in which our organization becomes a mass party capable of altering political reality throughout the country.

Phase Four, perhaps encompassing the second decade of the next century, will involve a nationwide struggle to place political power in the hands of the working-class majority for the

purpose of fully implementing the Labor Party's program for economic justice. Such a struggle will not be simple or easy, but success in this phase could mean a qualitative deepening of democracy and dignity, a shared abundance allowing for the free development of each person. It is important not to confuse the first with the fourth phase (or with the third or even the second).

II. What to Do Next

The question is often posed (especially given the mature decision not to rush into elections): "What is the Labor Party actually supposed to do?" At this moment, and for the immediate future, the answer is that — recognizing where we are in our growth — we must carry out the necessary tasks of the first phase of development. We must gather and consolidate a critical mass of members, begin developing an activist membership, accumulate experience and knowledge, develop an organizational and resource infrastructure, engage persistently in educational outreach, and prepare for the next phase of growth and development (1998).

We should understand that — given the complexity of reality — it is impossible to come up with a perfect blueprint to guide our work. Therefore, we should (in approximately every six-month period) regularly review our tasks and perspectives, both critically and positively assessing our accomplishments and our failures, in order to fine-tune our work and zero in on practical plans for the upcoming several months.

In the six-month period from January through June 1997, it seems reasonable to project the following tasks.

1. We should regularly send Labor Party speakers to address unions, community groups, and public forums — to explain the purpose, nature, and goals of the Labor Party and its relevance to issues of concern, and to recruit and win support for the party and its program. (This should ideally involve at least three activities per month.) We should train our membership to effectively represent the goals of the Labor Party and its relevance, and at the same time to use such occasions to gather information about concerns and ongoing activities and struggles of the constituencies being addressed by our speakers.
2. We should continue to engage in union support work, specifically in the present period the struggle of the Beverly nursing home workers, and other specific struggles as that is feasible. (This should involve at least one major activity per month.)
3. We should regularly distribute Labor Party literature (newspaper, flyers, etc.) and also efforts — such as petitioning — for national Labor Party campaigns. (There should be at least a once-a-month literature distribution — at public events, at workplaces, in front of libraries, at shopping

centers, in communities and at housing projects, downtown, at schools, etc.)

4. We should begin a forum series — a regular, educational, topical Labor Party event to which friends and contacts can be invited; to which speakers from various groups and milieus would be drawn; at which the knowledge and thinking of Labor Party members and supporters would be deepened; through which the Labor Party would become a consistent force and exercise a growing influence on Pittsburgh's intellectual and political life. (It has been suggested that a monthly forum series is advisable, although there is concern over whether this is too ambitious.)
5. We should carry out effective, systematic recruitment efforts to build the Labor Party's membership base, at the same time giving sustained attention on how members can be integrated into the life and activities of the party.
6. We should develop a financial base capable of sustaining Labor Party activity and growth. This will be a measure of how serious an organization the Labor Party is becoming; of the commitment, consciousness, and discipline of its membership; and of the growing capacity of the party to effectively bring about social change. Over and above national dues, there should be low dues (perhaps \$1 or \$2 a month) for all local members, combined with a voluntary (but highly organized, motivated) monthly financial sustainer to be pledged by as many members as possible.
This can only be accomplished in stages. Eventually, while sustainers would range from \$1 to \$50 per week, it would be ideal to be averaging at least \$10 per week for the entire local membership. Assuming 50 local members, this comes to \$2,000 per month — a goal toward which we would need to build, perhaps by the end of 1997. A more immediate goal: If we can get 20 members to give an average sustainer of \$5 per week, we would have a sustainer base of \$400 per month — which would fund an office, telephone, and modest supplies for \$200, providing a surplus of \$200 to build up a fund for our future activities. Ten percent of our local income should be sent to the national office, the rest should be used to build the party locally and regionally.
7. We should develop an organizational infrastructure that would involve a local organizer (first part-time, later full-time), an office and telephone, office equipment, and other resources. As practical, we should work with other chapters and with supporting unions to develop a similar infrastructure on a state-wide and regional level.

8. We should prepare for the electoral push to begin in 1998 — drawing on the expertise of activists, economists, urban planners, and others to develop a Labor Party community development program on which local candidates would run; researching legal and electoral and other relevant requirements and facts without which serious campaigns cannot be mounted; and developing strategic, tactical, and organizational thinking relevant for such campaigns.
9. We should organize a Pittsburgh area Labor Party educational conference, perhaps for June 1997. Such a conference could include prominent national Labor Party figures and supporters (such as Tony Maz-zocchi, Bob Clark, Elaine Bernard, etc.) plus others, dealing in plenary sessions, panel discussions, and workshops with issues of concern to the U.S. working class and the future of the Labor Party. This should be an organizing tool that we use through all of our work leading up to June — urging unions, community groups, etc. to send delegations, urging all Labor Party supporters to attend, urging all looking for progressive answers to society's problems to participate. This could make a positive "splash" that would propel us into the next six-month period of our work.
10. In July 1997 we should assess our efforts in all of the above activities, and on the basis of this assessment develop a new list of tasks for August-December 1997.

III. Structural Implications

We should maintain a schedule of monthly membership meetings, but obviously more than that will be needed to build a serious Labor Party. Flowing from the tasks outlined above, we should establish six committees. (All members should be urged to participate in at least one committee, and each committee should have a minimum of three active members — though some, such as the centrally important Speakers Outreach Committee, may need more.) All members should be engaged in outreach efforts, and each committee should be seen as focusing on one or another aspect of the Labor Party's reaching out to connect and communicate with more and more people, seeking to double, triple, and quadruple its membership, milieu, and general influence.

The six committees should be: 1. Speakers Outreach Committee, to develop and coordinate the efforts of local Labor Party speakers to address union meetings, community organization meetings, public events, etc. (not all speakers would necessarily be part of this committee); 2. Union Support Committee, to coordinate Labor Party support efforts to the Beverly workers struggle and other union struggles as feasible; 3. Literature Committee to oversee the development, acquisition, and regular distribution of Labor Party literature; 4. Fo-

rum Committee, to oversee the organization, production, and publicity for a forum series; 5. Membership Committee, to give sustained attention to recruitment, integration of members, and development of financial sustainer base; 6. Future Preparations Committee, to develop plan for June conference and also to initiate preliminary work related to future electoral efforts.

It will be impossible to maintain such an ambitious committee structure, and at the same time to ensure the local party's cohesion, without an active steering committee. It will also be important — as soon as it becomes possible — to secure someone who could function as an organizer.

The function of the part-time (and eventually full-time) organizer will be several-fold.

1. To be in touch with all committees and facilitate their functioning.
2. To oversee outreach efforts and monthly forums.
3. To head up the Membership Committee.
4. To ensure monthly mailings to the membership.
5. To maintain minimal but regular office hours.

Until it is possible to have an organizer, such functions will have to be carried out through the efforts of volunteers and the extra exertions of the steering committee.

Of crucial importance — as a practical body, not as a source of honorary titles — is the steering committee, which should meet once a month (and until we have an organizer, sometimes more often) to review the activities of the party committees and ensure that decisions of the monthly membership meetings are being carried out; to plan the monthly membership meetings; to maintain contact and coordination with national, statewide, and regional Labor Party structures; to give attention to urgent matters between membership meetings and develop tentative policies and proposals as necessary. The steering committee should be made up of six members (each should be a member — though not the chair — of one of the other committees) plus the organizer. Elections should be held not more than every six months, and not less than once a year.

There is another body that we should consider setting up: an advisory board of prominent and experienced Labor Party members who do not have the time to function on such a highly demanding entity as the steering committee, but who are prepared to lend their authority, their expertise, and their advice in efforts to build the party. Listed on local party letterhead and other materials, members of the advisory board should be regularly consulted on one or another aspect of party activities, and should perhaps meet once a year with the steering committee in order to evaluate past activities and consider future directions of the Labor Party. □

I Have Seen Their Future — and It Doesn't Work A Reply to "The Future of Our Labor Party"

by Bill Onasch

Bill Onasch, Vice-President of Amalgamated Transit Union Local 1287, and President of the Kansas City Area chapter of the Labor Party, will be a delegate to the Chapter Convention.

The American socialist leader James P. Cannon once remarked that if, despite his disbelief, there turned out to be a hereafter — and he made it to heaven — it would not be so much a reward for what he had done, but rather for what he had had to listen to. I appreciate Cannon's remark more with each passing day. Over the past thirty-some years, I have attended dozens of conferences called by various movements and I've had to listen to plenty.

A Long Overdue Change

The Labor Party Founding Convention, held in Cleveland last June, was a refreshing departure from the character of most of these gatherings. Certainly there were plenty of windbags hogging the mikes — some of them the usual suspects from those other conferences. But this convention was dominated by secondary union leaders mad as hell and not going to take it anymore. They assembled to push their unions into a new political movement fighting for some fundamental changes in our society. The likes of such a labor-led conference had not been seen by these delegates before except perhaps by a handful of the most senior participants.

While there was plenty of arguing over programmatic and organizational disputes, the prevailing mood at the Founding Convention was that of goodwill and enthusiasm for the new Labor Party. Most of us returned home with our batteries charged, ready to start building the new party in our local labor movement and communities.

Left — As in Left Out

But not all of the participants shared this ebullience. There was a loose coalition of various "left" currents and individuals — who had lectured and scolded the delegates about what they *must* do — who viewed the Labor Party as a bureaucratic sell-out. They have been proclaiming this to all who would listen (and quite a few who wouldn't) through various newsletters, e-mail lists, and left publications before, during, and since the Founding Convention. They are now armed with a fresh set of resolutions for the coming Chapter Convention in March. These resolutions, with an introductory article entitled "The Future of Our Labor Party," appear in the January issue of *Labor Party News and Discussion Bulletin*, published in Madison, Wisconsin.

Since the Founding Convention delegates rejected most of their ideas, this current naturally assumes the party must be undemocratic.

In their view only mindless hand-raisers could fail to see the historic importance of their demands.

Is the Labor Party undemocratic? Certainly if you look at this question abstractly you would have to conclude that the party falls far short of the ideals of workers' democracy espoused by many leftists. But for those of us who value content over form, and are seeking a plan of action today rather than timeless homilies, the question and answer is more complex.

First of all, serious socialist currents rooted in the working class don't mix up the democratic standards we demand from governmental institutions — with cops, jails, and gas chambers at their disposal — with the internal functioning of voluntary political associations.

Tony Mazzocchi doesn't have the power to deprive anyone of life, liberty, or a job. The party "bureaucrats" don't even have any significant material privileges to bestow or deny at their discretion. The authority of the Labor Party leadership is totally dependent on voluntary acceptance by the unions and individual members who have signed on. This is the best guarantee against autocratic rule. Any attempt to be heavy-handed would doom the organization to collapse.

In any democratic political organization that seeks to be more than a discussion club, there must be a balance between the right of participants to express themselves, and act as individuals, with a disciplined unity in action to implement majority decisions. Finding the right balance is never easy and the ideal ratio of this needed mix between democracy and centralism is subject to change — depending on the tasks before the organization.

During the formative stages of Labor Party Advocates (LPA), from the establishment of LPA to the Founding Convention of the Labor Party, the emphasis should have been on democratic expression — and by and large it was. The initiators, now denounced as bureaucrats by some, set down only a couple of simple basic principles. The Labor Party should be rooted in the labor movement, built on a foundation of endorsing unions. It should be issue-oriented rather than electoral-centric. The organizers proceeded cautiously, testing the waters as to what was achievable. After a substantial number of unions endorsed these principles, and a few thousand individual members had signed up, LPA called for the Founding Convention to construct a platform for these tenets.

Considering the bureaucratic culture of the U.S. labor movement, in which the initiators

and most delegates function, the Founding Convention was remarkably democratic. Committees representing various viewpoints reached consensus on excellent programmatic and organizational resolutions. These resolutions were openly debated for days, with over 400 delegates speaking from the floor. Some amendments from the floor were approved. To those accustomed to typical international union conventions, this gathering was an oxygen-rich, brain-clearing breath of fresh air.

We've Had Plenty of Architects — Now We're Looking for the Building Trades

Clearly, after the convention a shift in priorities was in order. We had a program, a good one. We had a workable structure. The indicated task in the local chapters was to take these accomplishments of the convention to local unions, to activists in various movements, and to our communities. We need to win union affiliations, recruit individual members, raise money, and establish a visible presence through a variety of public activities.

Some chapters have been doing this with varying degrees of modest success. The Chapter Convention should focus, in my opinion, on these party-building goals. The resolutions submitted by the "Future of Our Labor Party" group will tend to skew the discussion and divert the delegates from what needs attention.

In their introductory article, the "Future" group says, "The first few resolutions establish a solid groundwork of internal democracy that is essential to make a strong break from the bureaucratic 'money rules' leadership style that has been at the forefront of the labor movement for too long...the last two resolutions [are] a call for concrete action...we must move to a decisive break in '98 with the Democratic party by beginning to run our own candidates for office."

In short, the "Future" group wants to pick up where they left off at the Founding Convention, with everything up for debate.

Their "democracy" resolutions center on schemes for establishing multi-state party bodies that they hope will select them to rub shoulders with the "money rules" crowd on the National Council. Not something my shop-mates are likely to get excited about.

Electoral politics was hotly debated at the Founding Convention and a clear decision was rendered by the delegates — *there will be no electoral activity by the Labor Party at this time*. The only disciplinary action that the

"money rules" party bureaucracy has taken thus far, that I know of, was the revocation of the Buffalo chapter's charter after that group voted to endorse a Democrat in a local election. The chapter's status was restored after they rescinded their endorsement and removed the officers responsible for it. Personally I applaud this action in upholding the decision of the convention.

The convention also authorized a committee to further study the question of electoral strategy and to bring a report back to the next convention. That is the body that should be responsible for organizing further discussion. The Chapter Convention cannot alter the decisions of the Founding Convention and a rehearsal of the arguments from Cleveland could only be an irresponsible waste of the delegate's precious time.

The "Future" group claims to be made up of not only fighters for democracy within a bureaucratized party but also of advocates for chapters in an adversarial relationship with the "money rules" unions. This is destructive nonsense.

Real Role of Chapters

Chapters have a vital role to play in the Labor Party. They are the only body that workers from nonaffiliated unions, and those in our communities that are not union members, can participate in. The chapters should be organizing centers, carrying out the program and campaigns of the national party in local areas — including helping to coordinate local activities of the affiliated unions. Chapters should be a place where "ordinary" working people can feel comfortable, participate in realistic political projects, and develop their education and skills as political leaders of the working class. Chapters represent part of the division of labor in the total party project — not a faction at odds with the affiliated unions.

Déjà Vu All Over Again

The proposed "future" is really a throwback to the late 1960s, the era of the New Politics Convention and Peace & Freedom Party. That period was the last big test of how to build a viable mass political movement on widespread radical sentiment — and the left failed that test miserably.

With no firm roots in the working class, the middle-class intellectuals who dominated the left in that period squandered a big opportunity. They too were big on democracy and electoral politics.

Those who emphasized abstract democracy — the ultimate form being paralytic participatory democracy — talked themselves into a stupor from which many have not awakened to this day. Others, rejecting endless talk and craving action, went off to "serve the people," with dramatic adventures sometimes spilling over into terrorism — before settling down to become professors or stock brokers.

The P&FP electoral project lives on, due to its ballot status, in California. Every few years various radical sects battle one another over use of its ballot line — and receive a minuscule vote.

We've seen their future. It doesn't work. It didn't work with radical students thirty years ago and it stands less chance of success among working class activists today. The Chapter Convention should give short shrift to these resolutions and get on with the job of figuring out how we can transform our present organizing committee into a viable working class party. □

Building the Labor Party in the USA

Continued from page 20

the Labor Party is necessarily different from the parties of the employing class. It teaches that the working class must solve its own problems (and in this way will begin to solve the major problems of this class-divided society). The best way to explain this is not in an election campaign to win power and influence. To date it has always proved to be the worst way, whenever and wherever tried.

The second consideration that weighs heavily against electoral activity at this time is a recent experience in the debate over this issue. Gloria Mattera, secretary of the New York Metro chapter, reports that a statewide coordinating committee met in Albany on November 23, 1996, "to begin the process of forming a New York state labor party." An urgent request from the Rochester chapter said the Labor Party "must field or cross-endorse a candidate for Governor of New York in 1998 in order to secure a ballot position for the Labor Party for years to come," according to Gloria's report. (*Labor Party News & Discussion Bulletin*, vol. 2, no. 1, January 1997, p. 5)

This is another example of electoral activity illusion. A viable party such as the Labor Party can become will have no difficulty getting on

the ballot in all fifty states. Talk of fielding candidates before the party structure is in place and before the party has trained candidates to explain its program and purpose diverts attention from serious party building work. The notion of filing jointly with non-working class candidates is a sure and tested way to destroy the Labor Party before it's out of swaddling clothes. This, of course, is a "worst case" example. There will come a time when the Labor Party will field candidates and win control of government. But that is not now.

The time now is opportune for educational campaigns of every possible kind. Broad sections of working people in this country are anxious to find out what is really going on, justifiably suspicious that crooks infest high places of power in government and industry. The new AFL-CIO leadership is sensitive to the need to educate working-class leaders, and the make-up and content of the AFL-CIO's new official magazine testifies to this. *America @ Work* is worlds away from the old *AFL-CIO News*. No one dreamed in the days of Lane Kirkland that the official magazine would ever feature an article by an author such as William Greider and recommend his book on *The Manic Logic of Global Capitalism*. (See side-

bar on page 15 for excerpts from Greider's article.) This awareness of the need to educate and help develop a working-class consciousness is in complete accord with what is badly needed to build the Labor Party.

At the present time, the bulk of the labor bureaucracy is actively opposed to the labor party idea, but what the Sweeney leadership is doing in the way of education and its appeal to a new young layer of the working class will benefit the labor party development in the long term.

Another benefit can be expected (and prepared for) in the near future. Right now there seems to be some hope that the National Labor Relations Board is going to win lost strikes in the case of Caterpillar and the Detroit newspapers. The Clinton administration is making pro-labor promises. But its actions speak louder, as in the case of the American Airlines pilots' strike. And the final outcome of the maneuvers to get the NLRB to retrieve union gains from lost strikes is likely to destroy some illusions about "labor's friends." These are developments that the Labor Party chapter convention may find time to take note of in its deliberations on how best to build the Labor Party. □

BIDOM and the Labor Party

by Ben Stone

Since I consider a correct evaluation of the Labor Party at this stage of its existence, one of the most important, if not *the* most important, issues before us, and since I believe the position taken by the editors of *BIDOM* on the Labor Party to be incorrect, I feel constrained to enter the discussion revolving around the question of "electoral activity." And is it necessary to add, that even though we are on the same side in the class struggle and even close co-thinkers, this does not preclude differences of opinion from arising between us, especially as it pertains to tactics and strategy. And we will try to approach it in a comradely fashion. We must simply remember that we are dealing with a question which has no precedent in our history and we cannot simply go back to the books looking for the answers.

The *BIDOM* editors believe that the position taken by the Mazzocchi/Wages leadership at the founding convention of the Labor Party in June of 1996, of ruling out *any* electoral activity in the 1996 presidential election and for the next two years, to be correct. Correct or not, it was the decision of the convention and we all agree to abide by majority rule, the cornerstone of democracy. The Constitution, adopted unanimously by the convention, states clearly: "Finally, the Labor Party shall appoint a committee on developing our future electoral strategy to report to the second Labor Party convention. The Labor Party will not endorse candidates of any kind..."

Thus, the convention not only closed the door on any electoral activity on the part of the Labor Party over the next two years but specifically prohibited endorsing any candidate from any other party, which of course included the Democratic Party. This did not subsequently prevent Bob Wages, President of OCAW, from declaring in the September/October issue of the *OCAW Reporter* "...I intend to exercise my franchise in November to vote for President Clinton. And it won't be that difficult to do, given the choice I have."

If ever there was a blatant violation of the convention decisions, this was it. When I first saw this statement, I was shocked and outraged and I immediately dashed off a letter to Brother Wages excoriating him for this betrayal (naturally I received no reply). *BIDOM* has taken no position at all on this gross violation of the rules.

In light of the disciplinary action taken by Tony Mazzocchi and the Interim National Council (INC) against the Buffalo chapter and removing its chair, Paul Zarembka, from office for violating the very same rule that Bob Wages broke (but on a much larger scale), namely, endorsing a local candidate of the Democratic Party, the only conclusion one can come to is that Wages, Mazzocchi & Co. consider them-

selves above the "law" and can flout the convention rules with impunity. At least in the case of the Buffalo chapter one can plead in extenuation that this was a first offense, which was quickly rescinded by the chapter. What can one say about Wages' offense? Wages himself does not appear to have anything to say. *BIDOM* has nothing to say. As long as there is no defense of Wages's action, it will lend credence to the charge that Wages considers the Labor Party as a pressure point on the Democratic Party.

The fact that the AFL-CIO was strongly opposed to the Labor Party and any electoral activity (John Sweeney stated that the Labor Party should not have been born in an electoral year!) plus Wages's last-minute endorsement of Clinton after he protested (too much) against the evils of the two-party system, lends further suspicion that Wages had at the least, divided loyalties about the Democratic Party.

While *BIDOM* and its supporters have plenty to say about its dissenters, its favorite epithets being "sectarian" and "radical" (shades of the trade union bureaucracy!) it has no criticism whatsoever about the Labor Party officialdom. While we are fully aware of the transitional nature of the Labor Party and while we are 100% behind the Labor Party and our chapter, the New York Metro chapter, has been second to none in building the Labor Party (I believe we have the biggest chapter in the country), we do not bury our head in the sand and make believe that our officials can do no wrong. And the wrong they do can harm the Labor Party and its development.

Our position on our officials who have given evidence that they are breaking with the national trade union bureaucracy of the AFL-CIO must be one of *critical* support, as it has been traditionally. *BIDOM*'s support has been uncritical. *BIDOM* seems to be taking the position that there is only one way for the Labor Party to go, the Mazzocchi/Wages way. Any other way is sectarian. Comrade Bill Onasch ridicules Eric Lerner for advocating having a convention in 1997 rather than waiting until 1998, when the next convention was scheduled, with the hope that the convention will give the green light to doing what a Labor Party should do, i.e., run in election campaigns, so that working people, the poor, the homeless, could take heart that here at last, a party had come along which was serious about changing their condition of life.

Let the masses know that there is an alternative to the bosses' two-party system. Yes, Comrade Onasch, elections are not the only way to reach the working masses, but they are the *best* way. The fact that here is a Labor Party which has been created but will not run in election campaigns (at least for the next two years, possibly longer?) will not inspire or be taken seri-

ously by most working people. It only creates difficulties in the way of recruiting members and building the Labor Party.

Which leads to a comment on the organizational difficulties that are placed in the way of becoming an official chapter of the Labor Party. The rules are that in order to become an official chapter, the chapter must receive the endorsement of an established local trade union. Since the local trade unions are dominated, by and large, by the central labor councils, or by the international unions, it is not easy to receive an endorsement of the chapters from these bodies. In the specific case of the New York chapter, the chapter had to chase after the local unions for over two years before receiving a union endorsement. This despite the fact that the chapter had demonstrated its usefulness by such actions as the strike support it organized for the Midwest strikers (Staley, Bridgestone, Caterpillar).

Altogether \$7,000 was raised which went directly to the strikers. Our job is and has been that we can help the unions by holding rallies, joining picket lines, raising money, recruiting new members, building the Labor Party, etc. As this is being written we are planning to hold a social fund-raiser at the Village Gate on February 9, in honor of Michael Moore, who recently joined the New York Metro chapter.

Why was it so difficult for the chapter to receive a union endorsement? We will not go into the question as to why the criterion was set up in the first place that a union endorsement was necessary in order to obtain a charter. Having accepted that criterion, why was it so difficult to get a union endorsement? The answer was that the union leaderships, i.e., the trade union bureaucracy, has no love for the chapters and are bound to the reactionary national bureaucracy of the AFL-CIO, who would like to stay in bed with the Democratic Party and don't want to be disturbed by any upstart intruder.

The overall evaluation of the Labor Party has to take into account that the chapters have always been treated like stepchildren by the Labor Party leadership, especially Tony Mazzocchi, who ironically was the principal founder of Labor Party Advocates, the precursor of the Labor Party. From the very beginning Mazzocchi showed a disdain bordering on contempt for the LPA chapters. He expressed this disdain a number of times by retorting to his critics, "If you don't like it, leave. Go somewhere else." I was present at a meeting that was called in his honor by the New York Metro chapter, where he made those remarks. And he has made similar remarks at other chapter meetings.

What prompted those remarks was that at the end of his speech he was asked some questions about program. For several years during the LPA stage, there was virtually no program that was offered to the public. If you complained about the lack of a program, you had to be a leftist, the same epithets we keep hearing even today from those who should know better.

The chapters persevered and grew despite the lack of program, but at a snail's pace, until the

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In This Early Stage of the Labor Party

Support Should Far Outweigh Criticism

by George Saunders

Ben Stone is right that the Labor Party may be the most important issue before us. And we do have differences of opinion on evaluating the present stage of the labor party movement and what strategy and tactics are best to pursue in relation to that. Ben is also right that we need to discuss our differences in a comradely fashion. Reviewing these differences may help us clarify some of the deeper issues underlying the disagreements.

I want rather hastily, under pressure of a deadline, to respond to some of the points Ben raises. And please excuse me if I leave something out or repeat myself from writing in haste. I am sure that others as well as Ben and myself will be returning to these questions for further clarification in future issues of our magazine.

Ben argues that in adopting a position of critical support to the trade unions and their officials who have led the way in the formation of LPA and the Labor Party, *BIDOM* should be more critical.

I don't agree. I would argue that in adopting the tactic of critical support, there can be varying degrees of criticism and support, depending on the circumstances. The majority of our Editorial Committee and Editorial Board tend to agree with the approach taken by Bill Onasch in his "LPA Should Be the Major Focus for All Socialists" (*BIDOM*, March-April 1996).

Bill pointed out that, after a slow start, LPA had become "the most significant show of support for a labor party in the United States since the 1945-47 upsurge." He concluded from that: "there is no more important task for U.S. socialists today than building LPA." The emphasis was on building it. Not criticizing it. Bill also argued, rightly in my opinion, that this labor party initiative at this point "is quite fragile, and vulnerable to attacks from both right and left." (That suggests that an overemphasis on criticism, or excessive criticism, could be quite harmful at this stage.)

Here's an example of the destructive effects of excessive criticism. In violation of Labor Party convention decisions, the Buffalo chapter endorsed a local trade unionist running as a Democrat. Its charter was lifted. A great hue and cry was raised that Mazzocchi was being autocratic to do this. Members of one labor organization (at a university, if I remember right) got so riled up as a result of this critical furor that they withdrew the organization's endorsement of the Labor Party. The disaffiliation resolution was featured in the Wisconsin-based *Labor Party News and Discussion Bulletin*. To me

that's destructive. It doesn't contribute to the building of this party.

A Contradictory Movement

To go back to Bill Onasch's article. He observed that the Labor Party is acting as a gathering place for a class-struggle left wing, union fighters from Austin, Minnesota; Watsonville, California; Decatur, Illinois; and I would add, Detroit, Michigan. He indicated that the labor party movement is not homogeneous. It is contradictory. It reflects the combined and uneven development of the workers and their unions. Not all the movement's components are part of the class-struggle left wing. "Many are more traditionally-minded officials; some are opportunistic labor fakers."

Patient Pedagogy, Not Evangelical Zeal

Then came Onasch's key tactical prescription. "This is a situation that calls for patient pedagogy, not evangelical zeal." [Emphasis added.]

Onasch called for "coordinated efforts among revolutionary socialists" to give the fledgling labor party "urgently needed support." He did not call for criticism, but for support.

Does this mean we think the role of revolutionary socialists is just to be "yes-men, hand-raisers, cheerleaders, tail-enders" (fill in any other pejorative you wish; we've heard many) for the union officials leading this initiative?

Not at all. What Bill wrote, and what many of us agree with, is this: "an influential class-conscious vanguard" is needed for "providing analysis, program, strategic and tactical advice, as well as a hard-working, disciplined intervention in day-to-day activities."

This kind of analysis, plus strategic and tactical advice, appeared in two articles in the November-December 1996 *BIDOM*, the one by David Jones "Evaluating the Present Stage of the Labor Party Movement" and the one by Don Fowler on Wages's error in endorsing Clinton. The analysis, methodology, and tone of these two articles is completely consistent: they could have been written by the same author. They are also consistent, in my opinion, with Bill Onasch's article.

One of *BIDOM*'s supporters and contributors has even suggested that "Evaluating the Present Stage of the Labor Party Movement" be adopted as a kind of guiding document for our magazine's writing and work in relation to the labor party movement, expressing our general orientation. In that article you will find a calm,

objective assessment and concrete historical review of where this movement came from, why it emerged, and where it seems to be heading. The companion article by Fowler places Wages's error in the overall context.

"The development of an authentic labor party in the U.S. is, and will remain, a *contradictory* process...emerging from the highly contradictory American labor movement as it actually exists."

In this process, Fowler emphasizes, the most important trend is *not* that the OCAW leadership has failed to break decisively from bourgeois politics. What is more important is that "the movement which has emerged is based unambiguously on a segment of the unions. That is what should be supported, defended, and strengthened. Only that ultimately promises to provide the material basis for overcoming the illusions in capitalist politics expressed in Wages's message."

Differentiation in the Union Bureaucracy

Perhaps one source of our disagreements with Ben Stone is on how to deal with the trade union bureaucracy in general. Is the union bureaucracy simply an undifferentiated mass of corrupt "labor fakers," all serving as "labor lieutenants of the capitalist class," interested only in their power and privileges, in what they can get out of their salaried positions? Must we distrust and stand ready to denounce any and every labor official at every moment? Or are there some who sincerely wish to represent their members' interests and who we can work with? Or others who vacillate, depending on the pressures?

We need to look at what Cannon wrote in the early 1930s about the "progressives" among union bureaucrats. And to study how the Minneapolis Trotskyists dealt with union officials of various kinds in the course of their struggle (described in Farrell Dobbs's four-volume series, *Teamster Rebellion*, *Teamster Power*, *Teamster Politics*, and *Teamster Bureaucracy*).

Of course in all of this the mobilization of the rank and file is the central task. But the question of appraising and dealing with union officials remains a consideration.

It's obvious that today there are important splits and fissures in this intermediate social layer — the result of contradictory pressures bearing down on them from the bosses on one side and from an increasingly restive rank and file on the other. How to relate tactically to one or another component of labor officialdom in any particular situation needs to be considered

and discussed. Surely that is a subject for future articles.

Back to the Books?

I agree with Ben that *simply* going "back to the books looking for answers" won't get us far. But I don't agree that this question "has no precedent in our history." There *are* some precedents, and one of the best minds in the history of the labor movement, Frederick Engels, who together with Marx was the first to work out the method of scientific socialism — dialectical materialism — had something to say about one of those precedents.

Engels has often been quoted on the question of an attempt in the late 1880s to form a labor party in the United States. What he had to say then has seemed pertinent to many active in the labor party movement today. That's not surprising because we use the same method as Engels, and we were taught by him and Marx and those who learned from them, such as Lenin, Trotsky, Luxemburg, Cannon, and many of Cannon's associates (Dobbs, Kerry, Hansen, Novack, Breitman, etc.).

For example, in an article titled "Formation of Labor Party Advocates and Discussion on the Left," written not long after LPA was founded (by decision of the OCAW national convention of August 1991), David Riehle quoted in this magazine what he called an "often cited comment" by Engels addressed to F.A. Sorge. Engels wrote more than one letter about the sectarian German Marxists who were holding back from or being overly critical about an attempt at what Engels called "national consolidation of the working men's party." (See Engels's letter to the American socialist Florence Kelly reprinted elsewhere in this issue.)

Not long after the Labor Party founding convention of June 1996 one of our contributors, Joe Auciello, sent me an excerpt from Engels's 1886 letter to Florence Kelly. We intended to print it in our November-December issue, but time and space would not permit. So we are reprinting it now. I think it is highly instructive, and I do think it's helpful to quote from it and discuss it (which I will do below). In this case I think it's a good idea to "go back to the books" in deciding how to balance support and criticism at the beginning stages of a movement like this.

Three Specific Points

Aside from the vexed question of "running candidates *now*" (whose inadequacy as a panacea for solving all problems of the Labor Party Frank Lovell has demonstrated elsewhere in this issue), Ben Stone's letter hinges on three complaints:

1. No action has been taken by the Labor Party's Interim National Council against Bob Wages for his endorsement of Clinton in the 1996 election.
2. It was hard for the New York City Metro Chapter to find a labor organization that would endorse it, because chapters are treated like "stepchildren."

3. Mazzocchi was rude to some LPA members who several years ago called for LPA to adopt a program. (He allegedly said words to the effect, "If you don't like what we're doing, go somewhere else.")

Let me take up the points in reverse order.

Too Slow in Adopting a Program?

Tony Mazzocchi apparently expressed impatience with those who wanted LPA to adopt a program right there and then. Perhaps he expressed himself rudely, but I think he was right that the process of working out the Labor Party's program could not be hurried.

The Labor Party now has a program. And it is quite a good program, better than many of us expected. (And it will probably be expanded and improved as the process of building the Labor Party continues.)

When the incident Ben mentions happened, a few years ago apparently, the nucleus of unions and unionists around LPA had not yet grown large enough. If LPA had unilaterally adopted a program then, it wouldn't have represented much in the unions. It wouldn't have had the weight that the present program has. There needed to be a democratic process among a large enough core of pro-labor-party unions to really represent something. (Unions representing an estimated 1.2 million organized workers supported the founding convention.) That wasn't achieved until 1996. It took time.

The process of writing the program was a rich and valuable one. There was a real give and take, a discussion among hundreds, if not thousands, of trade unionists and union supporters. Out of that process the present program emerged.

It would have been better for Tony Mazzocchi not to be rude (*if* he was — I wasn't there, so I don't know, and rudeness is sometimes in the eye of the beholder), but he was right about not being too hasty to adopt a program, that only a democratic and representative convention could do that. That is what happened. I think we should be grateful about it, and not harbor resentment that it didn't happen faster.

What Is the Weight of the Chapters?

The chapters should not be "treated as stepchildren." And I don't think they are. The *Labor Party Press* has given attention to chapter activities, including those of the New York Metro Chapter. And more is promised: in a February 10 letter to party members, Mazzocchi writes, "Beginning March 1, we will produce a bi-monthly organizing newsletter, *Party Builder*, for Labor Party activists like you. The newsletter will contain organizing strategy and reports — in more depth than the *Labor Party Press*."

Still, the heart of a labor party has to be the organizations of the working class, the unions. Mazzocchi was and is right to stress winning the affiliation of more unions and deepening Labor Party membership within endorsing or affiliated unions. If, in the incident Ben cites, chapter members were fixated on the lack of a program, instead of finding ways to win union endorse-

ments, it's not surprising that Mazzocchi showed impatience. Experience shows that it was possible to win many unions to the *idea* of a labor party, and then, *with them*, work out a program.

Why Wait for the Unions?

Right now, unfortunately, many chapters are limited mostly to radicals of one kind or another (especially in New York City, where almost every imaginable shading of radical can be found). There's an important difference between a self-selected group of radicals in a chapter and the workers in a union. The union workers are organized because of their relation to production, not by self-selection. Because of their place in production they carry much more social weight than a chance group of like-minded individuals, however highly conscious. That's why a union-based party, a party of organized labor, can become such a powerful force for social change.

If a few dozen individuals in a chapter, even in a couple of dozen chapters, thought that they, rather than the unions, should decide the program of the labor party, they had their priorities backward. They didn't understand the strategy Mazzocchi and his cothinkers were trying to pursue. Maybe that's why he suggested they go try doing it on their own.

Many of us have decades of experience in the radical movement, and many — like Ben Stone, Frank Lovell, Bill Onasch, David Riehle, and others — have decades of union experience. What if, in the early '90s, we had drawn up a program, called ourselves a "labor party," and started running candidates? Or what if the Labor Militant group did that? At best such a group would have only a hundred or so supporters nationally and could win votes only in the thousands.

A labor party with a program representing the needs and interests of the majority of organized labor — or representing at least a substantial section of it — would have tens of thousands of supporters and could win *millions* of votes.

That is what I think Mazzocchi was getting at when he said, "If you don't like it, go elsewhere" (if he actually did say that). The idea is, if you want to be part of a labor party movement, act accordingly. If you want to be a small propaganda group with an excellent program but not really linked with organized labor, then do that. For years, when radicals had been driven out of the unions, or had little influence in them, the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) ran election campaigns not based on the unions — and for many years it did that well, but it was aiming to do more. It usually called for the unions to form a labor party. (See, for example, Sarah Lovell's model campaign speech as an SWP candidate in Detroit — reprinted in the July-August 1994 issue of *BIDOM*.)

The SWP in its healthy years called for a labor party based on the unions, because the potential that such a labor party has for raising class consciousness, mobilizing the working class as a whole, and bringing about sweeping change goes far beyond what even the best

radical group could do by itself. ("The great thing is to get the working class to move *as a class*," as Engels put it.)

That, as Ben suggests, is why Trotsky and Cannon saw the labor party as *transitional*, as moving in the direction of socialist revolution.

The Task of Radicals in the Labor Party

Our task is to try to link the broader understanding, experience, and perspectives that revolutionary socialists have together with the radicalizing trends within the union movement. In that sense, right now the Labor Party is "the only game in town." "Going elsewhere" won't accomplish much. The present labor party movement is the best chance the American working class has had so far to acquire its own political voice independent of control by the employing class. We need to make the most of it.

Impatience that the program wasn't adopted more quickly or more perfectly doesn't help us find the way to work most effectively to build this best-chance movement.

Ben Stone says that what's most important is "political correctness." But I would agree with Engels, who said in his letter to Florence Kelly:

"It is far more important that the movement should spread, proceed harmoniously, take root, and embrace as much as possible the whole American proletariat than that it should start and proceed, from the beginning, on theoretically perfectly correct lines."

Still a Beginning Phase

The Labor Party, despite its name, is still, at the beginning stage, really just a larger version of Labor Party Advocates; it is not yet fully a party. It is more a solid and substantial *organizing committee* for a party. (And as Bill Onasch pointed out, it is vulnerable to destruction by attacks from left or right.) It needs to "proceed harmoniously." To paraphrase Engels, "anything that might delay or prevent the national consolidation of the labor party movement should be considered a *great mistake*." Disproportionate or untimely criticism is one such thing.

If the present labor party movement were to win the endorsement and affiliation of several of the largest unions, say, the Teamsters and the Service Employees (SEIU), in both of which it already has support, then it could more nearly begin to act as a party. Then it could seriously claim to represent a decisive sector of organized labor. But we're not there yet. Let's not have illusions about how far the movement has progressed and what more needs to be done.

Getting Union Endorsements

Ben Stone's second complaint, that it took a long time for the New York Metro Chapter to find a union that would endorse it, seems to me again an expression of impatience with a difficult process, irritation that history doesn't move faster.

"Our theory is not a dogma but the exposition of a process of evolution, and that process involves successive phases," as Engels put it. We

need to know, and to help others see, what phase we're in and how to act accordingly.

Of course, if there were more revolutionary socialists in the leaderships of unions, the Labor Party could be built faster and chapters could get endorsements quicker.

Why aren't there more politically conscious, class-struggle fighters in the leadership of unions? (There *are* some — they head union locals here and there; and those union leaderships who are promoting the "organizing model" as opposed to the "service model" are clearly moving in a class-struggle direction.) But as a whole the conscious radicals and revolutionaries were *driven out* of the unions during the postwar boom and the Cold War witch-hunt era of the late 1940s and the '50s. The bureaucracy became entrenched and conservatized, bought up, coopted, housebroken, and strait-jacketed by the capitalist government.

But during the 1960s the anti-Communist hypnosis that dominated much of American society — which the capitalists were able to impose on the basis of the postwar boom — was finally broken by the civil rights movement, the anti-Vietnam war movement, the victory of the Cuban revolution, the defeat of U.S. imperialism in Vietnam, and similar major historical events.

Since the 1960s it has been possible for radicals to be active and gain influence in the union movement — not just because they wanted to, but because *times changed*. The boom ended, and capitalism entered into a new "long wave" of decline. More and more workers have been radicalized as they saw their living standards decline, with the end of the boom, and experienced intensified attacks, including union-busting, by the bosses, who are driven by the falling rate of profit to try to extract more surplus value out of the living labor of the working class.

Nevertheless, the anti-Communist atmosphere in the unions (promoted by the employers, the government and its police agencies, and by the "business unionist" bureaucracy) still has not been overcome.

It's not enough for radicals to *desire* to gain leadership and influence in the unions. They need to know *how* to do so, how to apply the transitional method used by Marx and Engels, and made more explicit by Trotsky and the Fourth International in the "Transitional Program of Socialist Revolution." (In the late 1970s and after, the policy of the Barnes group that took over the SWP — the policy of "talking socialism" in the unions — did not use the transitional approach; theirs was a good example of how *not* to try winning influence and leadership in the unions.)

Radicals in the Unions

There are radicals, revolutionary socialists, conscious class-struggle elements who have learned how to gain or retain influence in the unions. One of the best recent examples is provided by some of those who built and are building the rank-and-file caucus Teamsters for a Democratic Union (TDU).

I heard a TDU spokesperson at the Meeting the Challenge labor conference in St. Paul, Minnesota, the second weekend of February. TDU's aim, he said, is to make the Teamsters a model for the rest of the labor movement in fighting the bosses and mobilizing and ensuring democratic participation by the membership. This is a great new change in a union of 1.4 million that until recently was dominated by a corrupt, conservative bureaucracy. They routinely engaged in anti-Communist witch-hunting — and that bureaucracy is still entrenched in local areas and regions.

That kind of bureaucracy still dominates in many, if not most, unions. But a section of more honest and member-responsive officials, represented in the Teamsters by Ron Carey, has helped bring changes and create new openings in the union movement. The Teamsters vote in the AFL-CIO, wielded by Carey, played a key role in the removal of Kirkland and his replacement by the "New Voice" leadership of the AFL-CIO. Sweeney, et al. are, it's true, continuing the old policy of class collaboration, but at the same time they are being forced to engage in or support some class battles. This changing situation needs to be the subject of future articles.

Radicalization in the Ranks of Labor

Following the TDU example, there are more and more rank-and-file caucuses developing in the unions — the New Directions caucus in the UAW is only one example. Michael Hirsch describes the reform caucus "Members for a Better Union" in the SEIU in the winter 1997 *New Politics*. (Incidentally, Bob Fitch's article "Sweeney Among the Warlords," in that same issue, gives information that should help us identify the differentiations now going on in the labor bureaucracy and in the labor movement generally.)

Radicalized class-struggle fighters have emerged out of many of the bitter strike battles of recent years (PATCO, Phelps-Dodge, Hormel, Staley, the Detroit newspaper strike). There are progressives and radicalized trade union elements around the Meeting the Challenge committee in the Twin Cities, which has held successful annual conferences on class-struggle lines for five years in a row. There are class-struggle elements who have taken part in Labor Notes conferences, in Jobs with Justice coalitions, and in other educational and organizing activities over the past decade and more. Most of these forces are supporting and building the Labor Party.

The leadership that emerged in the OCAW in the 1980s is also part of this general trend; theirs is a class-struggle outlook, although they are not consistent revolutionary socialists. (David Jones gave a careful and solid assessment of the political conception they represent in his "Evaluating the Present Stage of the Labor Party Movement" in our November-December issue.)

Where the Critics Go Wrong

It seems to me that the critics in the New York Metro Chapter, or the "Future of Our Labor Party" group, make a big mistake. Instead of seeking common ground with the OCAW and other union leaderships in the Labor Party, instead of pursuing the aims we have in common of building the movement for a labor party, they seem obsessed with finding some distinctive recipe that they can put forward to mark themselves off in opposition to the leadership. Their thinking seems to be: "How can we one-up the leadership? How can we make them look bad, so that we can look good?"

If they spent less time on concerns like that, they might have more time to pursue such goals as winning the affiliation of unions like Teamsters Local 966 to the Labor Party.

Teamsters Local 966

Why do I mention this local? I read about it in an article by Bob Fitch in the *Village Voice* of December 31, 1996, on the subject of the victory by Ron Carey and the TDU over the reactionary Hoffa Junior forces in last year's Teamsters election.

Experience has shown that pro-Carey reformers and TDU activists tend to see the need for a labor party and to respond positively to the idea. When Bob Wages presented the labor party idea to the TDU convention in 1995 he got a strong response, as Charles Walker reported in the pages of this magazine. In Arizona, TDUs who liked what Wages had to say about the labor party helped win endorsement of LPA by a 7,000-member statewide union body, Teamsters Local 104. (LPA activists in OCAW also helped get endorsement of the Arizona chapter from the only OCAW local in the state.)

A pro-Carey local in Chicago, Teamsters Local 705, is working closely with Labor Party leaders to establish "a model internal union organizing committee," as Tony Mazzocchi indicates in the March 1997 *Labor Party Press*.

Here's what Bob Fitch reported about Teamsters Local 966:

"One place where Carey wielded his broom ... was New York's Local 966. Carey had the International take over this local, which Jack McCarthy and his four sons had been running for 30 years. Jack was a five-time convicted labor racketeer. Their enterprise was ripe for trusteeship.

"It was also a perfect example of how Carey, with the help of dedicated TDU activists brought in as business agents, kicked out the crooks, brought the members into the life of the union, and turned his own candidacy into a rank-and-file cause.

"Local 966 started doing things that a union is supposed to do: file grievances, protest bad conditions, strike. It became a union where the staff took pay cuts instead of the members. But last June it was time to see if the culture of 966 had truly changed. A slate from TDU, and workers from the shops, challenged the McCarthy forces for every office in the local. The reformers looked like the membership:

Mike Wilson, an African American repairman from National Reprographics; Joe Diaz, a grave digger from the Greenwood Cemetery; Tony Ubinas, a truck driver for Fuji Photo; Yvette Vega, a Latina secretary who'd kept the books for he McCarthy forces. The reform slate won 10-1. Six months later, Carey took Local 966 by 11-1."

Let's Win the Teamsters to the Labor Party

Obviously the reform Teamsters locals are logical places to look for more support for the Labor Party. One approach might be to invite members and leaders of Local 966 to tell their story at a public forum organized by the New York Metro Chapter. That might be a good follow-up to the event with Michael Moore. Seeking Local 966's involvement in a coalition to build for the Detroit days of action, June 13-14, might be another way. And surely there are other union locals around New York, and elsewhere, where similar processes are going on. One has only to keep one's eyes and ears open for such things. And orient toward that kind of action.

That's a far more productive approach than complaining about Tony Mazzocchi. The critics do have a choice: to go elsewhere and try to build their own perfect conception of a labor party. The reality is that this actually existing initial formation, with all its imperfections, is the best chance American workers have had so far of getting a political party of their own.

That's something to be glad about. It's something we've looked for for decades. The emphasis needs to be on supporting and building it, and criticisms need to be kept in sensible proportion within that larger perspective.

What About Wages?

The question of how to assess Wages's error in endorsing Clinton was answered in essence in Don Fowler's article in our November-December 1996 issue, which Ben Stone rightly praises — and which the editors of *BIDOM* made a point of obtaining and publishing. There is a process going on. It includes false steps and retreats as well as forward motion. Like all processes it is *contradictory*, the result of pressures from different directions.

Wages's action was one such retreat. It was wrong. The unreconstructed Stalinist class collaborationists, the vultures of Gus Hall's so-called "Communist Party," have gloatingly applauded the fact that, as they put it, Wages wouldn't allow the OCAW to become isolated from the rest of the trade union movement.

In other words, the OCAW leadership, like the leaderships of the BMW, AFGE, UMWA, and some other LP-endorsing unions, felt pressed to do what the majority of the AFL-CIO was doing. As they saw it, they wanted to deny the U.S. presidency to forces that they thought would be even more anti-union than Clinton. They don't yet see that the super-rich have their ways of using the presidency, no matter which of their parties is in office. As Don Fowler said, it would have been better if the OCAW had

advised its membership to just "sit this one out," or if pro-LP unions had been strong enough in some local areas, to have run their own candidates on the labor party program.

But the process has not advanced that far yet. Even in Cleveland, whose AFL-CIO central labor body endorsed the LP and hosted the founding convention, and found itself in a fierce fight against the Democratic mayor it had previously supported, the idea of fielding a local Labor Party slate has not been considered.

What is the solution to this problem? Is it to wage a war against progressive elements that have emerged in union leaderships? Should all the unions that made Wages's mistake about the 1996 election be kicked out of the Labor Party? If so, we'd be back to zero again.

The solution that Wages himself proposed, and that the OCAW is pursuing, is to keep building the Labor Party, stronger, wider, deeper, so that the time will come when workers won't be stuck with a choice among bosses' parties. They will have their own alternative.

Don Fowler made the essential point:

"The current leadership of OCAW, from all appearances, remains committed to the labor party effort they inaugurated five years ago. They have made it quite clear, and Wages says so again [in his message that also endorsed Clinton], that their perspective is a mass-based labor party supported by a decisive segment of the unions which will be able to contend in elections on a more or less equal basis with the two bosses' parties. Are they sincere? Or is this just a complicated maneuver to build a "progressive" pressure group?"

Fowler goes on: "It cannot be determined, without further experience, which tendency is the more fundamental here: the OCAW's endorsement of [Clinton] or its commitment to building a labor party."

You could dismiss the OCAW leaders' labor party efforts as so much hype. You could accept Alexander Cockburn's theory that it's all an elaborate ruse. You might believe that these unions have spent all the energy and resources they have in trying to build a labor party as just a more roundabout way of supporting the bosses politically. But to me this seems a far-fetched "conspiracy" theory. At any rate, as Fowler suggests, we should allow the test of time and experience to show.

What if one were to conclude right now, prematurely in my opinion, that the Labor Party leadership is essentially not to be trusted? Where would that leave us?

Instead of building further on all the positive steps that have been made, we would have to start waging a war against people who have been highly effective in bringing the process along so far. Maybe something like that will be necessary in the future. But to do so now, without the test of experience on which way the OCAW leaders' contradiction will break, would be leaping to premature conclusions. Yet that is the direction pointed to by the excessive criticism of the "Future of Our Labor Party" group.

An Underlying Pessimism

There's really a current of pessimism, if not despair, underlying the "Future" group's criticism. These critics don't see that the same circumstances that prompted the OCAW leaders and many other union leaders to advocate a labor party still exist and will continue to drive them to build the labor party.

These union leaders constantly experience the need for an alternative to being trapped in the Democrats' back pocket as the bipartisan government takes one action after another detrimental to the unions. Most of the union leaders in the labor party movement tend to be responsive to their members, who are being squeezed day in, day out by the capitalists — and by the capitalists' bipartisan government.

The pro-labor party officials are forced by the pressures of the situation, which they can understand as well as we. They are obliged to seek ways to fight back against the ruling capitalist class, which is interested in destroying the unions. These officials usually are not among the promoters of labor-management cooperation. They know the bosses are out to break, or at least cripple, the unions, and they realize their choice is: surrender or fight back. It's no accident that Tony Mazzocchi and Ron Carey were among the leaders who, in response to rank-and-file pressure, played a key role in getting the AFL-CIO to call the June 13-14 Detroit march.

It seems to me that the sectarians and ultra-lefts (and these are not pejorative terms; they define real currents in the labor and radical movements) tend to single out for attack and criticism precisely those leadership figures who are moving in a class struggle direction, those who have been most helpful to the cause.

There is a *conservative* impulse beneath this "radical" criticism. (As Trotsky told Cannon, sectarians aren't revolutionary; they're conservative.) They carp at those who are moving in the right direction, who are able to mobilize real resources, who can help our class as a whole fight back effectively, so that the one-sided class war stops being all one-sided. The sectarians and ultra-lefts, in their impatience for better leaders (or imagining themselves to be such leaders), act destructively toward genuine leaders who are helping bring about radical change.

At a Militant Labor Forum in 1964 I saw Spartacists hissing and spitting vituperation at Malcolm X. At bottom they were frightened, I believe, by the revolutionary potential he represented. I have observed similar hostility toward Ron Carey by some who imagine themselves to be Trotskyists.

So long as the unions aren't led by conscious revolutionary socialists, we need to *work with* union leaders who are responsive to the ranks and are pursuing class struggle objectives, even if inconsistently. We should point out those inconsistencies, but not in a confrontational or destructive way.

While keeping alive and applying the transitional program and method, while basing ourselves on class struggle aims and objectives, by working together with trade union elements

willing and able to fight the bosses, we help advance the whole process that leads toward fundamental social change.

The poor, the homeless, etc., of whom Ben Stone speaks eloquently are not going to be saved by "candidates" on a white horse. Millions of organized workers moving in a common direction with a common aim, to assert their needs as against the profit-needs of the ruling rich — for example, by mass mobilizations in Detroit and Windsor, Ontario — that is the force that can answer the unremitting employers' offensive and begin to change society.

That kind of force may, depending on the situation, use the election of its representatives to public office as a tactic of struggle. Or it may use other tactics.

The Marxist Method

Our magazine uses a name taken from the title of one of Leon Trotsky's last works, "In Defense of Marxism."

How did the founders of Marxism view the role of revolutionary socialists in relation to the working class movement as a whole? Here's how Marx and Engels put it in 1848:

We "do not form a separate party opposed to other working class parties."

We "have no interests separate and apart from those of the proletariat as a whole."

We "do not set up any sectarian principles of [our] own, by which to shape and mold the working-class movement."

We "point out and bring to the fore the common interests of the entire proletariat, independently of all nationality."

"In the various stages of development which the struggle of the working class against the bourgeoisie *has to* [emphasis added — has to] go through, [we] always and everywhere represent the interests of the movement as a whole."

"The immediate aim of the Communists is the same as that of all the other working-class parties: formation of the proletariat into a class [meaning promoting workers' awareness of themselves as part of a class and consolidating that class as a conscious force], overthrow of the bourgeois supremacy, conquest of political power by the proletariat."

Our theoretical conclusions, Marx and Engels said, "merely express, in general terms, actual relations springing from an existing class struggle, from a historical movement going on under our very eyes."

To apply this method is the purpose of our magazine: "to express, in general terms, actual relations" in the "existing class struggle," deriving from the "historical movement going on under our very eyes."

In my opinion the Marxist method, the scientific socialist method, has been well applied in our magazine. I would cite, among many others, Frank Lovell's articles in recent years (in fact, since his founding of this magazine), the article by David Jones on "The Present Stage of the Labor Party Movement" (and his writings in previous issues), the article by Don Fowler on Wages's endorsement of Clinton, and the arti-

cles by David Riehle on the founding of LPA (see our March-April issue of last year) and his talk on the experience of the Minnesota Farmer-Labor Party, which was given at the LPA educational conference in Detroit in December 1992 and printed in this magazine in 1993 together with the article by Warren Creel from the *Fourth International* magazine of March 1946 on the demise of the Minnesota FLP.

I think our readers could benefit from rereading those articles and absorbing the method of approaching reality embodied there. A true understanding of reality comes only when we put all the elements together in the proper perspective — for example, not just Wages's endorsement of Clinton as an isolated action but all that Wages and the other OCAW leaders have done in the whole past period.

Critical Support

Jane Slaughter has an article "Prospects for the Labor Party" in the Winter 1997 issue of *New Politics*. Her article has its strengths and its weaknesses, and we hope to have further discussion of it in a future issue. But one observation she makes bears repeating:

"It is important to have a realistic assessment of the balance of forces within the Labor Party. *Many leftists spend a great deal of time... criticizing the actions of leaders* [emphasis added]. Yes, the leaders have great influence, but members are part of the equation... [Members] *need not be paralyzed* [emphasis added] by policies with which they do not agree, because those policies can be changed; they have been changed before." Slaughter goes on to outline a series of things members can do to build the party and make it a greater force.

"Many of us have been active in the labor movement for decades," she concludes, "pushing and prodding it to reform, to become more militant, to shape up. We should not forget that this Labor Party has the potential to help change the labor movement..." And to help change this society and the world, we would add.

Criticism has its place. But it also has its dangers. It can become corrosive and counter-productive; it can paralyze creative thought and action.

In this connection, I think Joseph Hansen set a good example. He advocated and practiced critical support of the Fidelista leadership of the Cuban revolution. His overwhelming emphasis was on support. (After all they led a revolution and have helped sustain it for decades under terribly difficult conditions.) Hansen took note of the errors and weaknesses of the Fidelista "revolutionists of action." He noted the errors, but did not swell them out of proportion.

That is the way Don Fowler approached the question of Wages's error on Clinton. That is how we should proceed. The record of the LP leadership taken as a whole, and at this stage, remains worthy of maximum support and minimum criticism by those who use the Marxist method. □

From the Arsenal of Marxism

Engels on the Movement for an American Workingmen's Party, Sectarianism, and the Right Timing of Criticism

Karl Marx's collaborator Frederick Engels, 110 years ago, expressed his approach toward a mass movement then developing for a workingmen's party in the United States. His method of approaching the question can help us orient productively toward the labor party movement today.

This excerpt is from a letter of December 28, 1886, by Engels to the American socialist Florence Kelly-Wischmewetzky in New York. The preface Engels referred to was his "The Working Class Movement in America: Preface to the American Edition of *The Condition of the Working Class in England*." Paragraphing has been added.

My preface will of course turn entirely on the immense stride made by the American working men in the last ten months, and naturally also touch [on] Henry George and his land scheme. But it cannot pretend to deal extensively with it. Nor do I think the time for that has come. It is far more important that the movement should spread, proceed harmoniously, take root, and embrace as much as possible the whole American proletariat than that it should start and proceed, from the beginning, on theoretically perfectly correct lines. There is no better road to theoretical clearness of comprehension than to learn by making one's own mistakes, "*durch Schaden klug werden*" [become wise through bitter experience]. And for a whole large class, there is no other road, especially for a nation so eminently practical and so contemptuous of theory as the Americans.

The great thing is to get the working class to move *as a class*; that once obtained, they will soon find the right direction, and all who resist, Henry George or Powderly, will be left out in the cold with small sects of their own. Therefore I think also the Knights of Labor a most important factor in the movement which ought not to be pooh-poohed from without but to be revolutionized from within, and I consider that many of the Germans there made a grievous mistake when they tried, in

the face of a mighty and glorious movement not of their creation, to make of their imported and not always understood theory a kind of *alleinseligmachendes Dogma* [the only dogma bestowing true grace], and to keep aloof from any movement which did not accept that dogma.

Our theory is not a dogma but the exposition of a process of evolution, and that process involves successive phases. To expect that the Americans will start with the full consciousness of the theory worked out in older industrial countries is to expect the impossible. What the Germans ought to do is to act up to their own theory — if they understand it, as we did in 1845 and 1848 — to go in [to] any real general working-class movement, accept its actual starting point as such, and work it gradually up to the theoretical level by pointing out how every mistake made, every reverse suffered, was a necessary consequence of mistaken theoretical views in the original programme: they ought in the words of the "Kommunistischen Manifest": *in der Gegenwart der Bewegung die Zukunft der Bewegung zu repräsentieren* [to represent in the present (stage) of the movement the future of the movement.]

But above all give the movement time to consolidate; do not make the inevitable confusion of the first start worse confounded by

forcing down people's throat things which, at present, they cannot properly understand, but which they will soon learn. A million or two of working men's votes next November or a bona fide working men's party is worth infinitely more at present than a hundred thousand votes for a doctrinally perfect platform.

The very first attempt — soon to be made if the movement progresses — to consolidate the moving masses on a national basis will bring them all face to face, Georgites [followers of Henry George], Knights of Labor, Trades Unionists and all; and if our German friends by that time have learnt enough of the language of the country to go in for a discussion, then will be the time for them to criticize the views of the others and thus, by showing up the inconsistencies of the various standpoints, to bring them gradually to understand their own actual position, the position made for them by the correlation of capital and wage labour.

But anything that might delay or prevent that national consolidation of the working men's party — on no matter what platform — I should consider a great mistake, and therefore I do not think the time has arrived to speak out fully and exhaustively either with regard to Henry George or the Knights of Labor... □

BIDOM and the Labor Party

Continued from page 26
founding convention, which finally provided us with a constitution and a program. We can now say what we stand for, which we could not do before. From the outset Mazzocchi exhibited a "trade unionist" mentality, treating the chapters as a bunch of "lefties," not much worth listening to. It is rather a sad commentary on the development of the LPA/LP that longtime comrades who have been in the revolutionary movement for many years can now join in the chorus of condemnation of the chapters with epithets like "radical" and "sectarian."

The saving grace of the November/December issue of *BIDOM*, dealing with the Labor Party, was the article by Don Fowler. Comrade Fowler took due note of the fiasco of Wages endorsing Clinton, although unfortunately Fowler watered down his critique by saying, "There is no reason not to take Wages's argument as the expression of an honest conviction. It is not equivalent to the duplicity of the CP in 1936 and afterwards." This is not a question of Wages's honesty, or sincerity, or good intentions. It is a question of political correctness, and the criterion for political correctness is — what serves the working class and what doesn't.

The central fact is that Wages did not serve the interests of the working class by endorsing Clinton as well as by betraying the guidelines set up by the Labor Party. This is what *miseducates* the labor movement and the working class.

There is much more to be said on this issue and it will be said in future articles. It would be in order for *BIDOM* to advance the discussion by calling for contributions from its readers, pro and con, and even have a special issue largely or entirely devoted to the Labor Party. □

Social Conditions on the Eve of Deng's Death

by Zhang Kai

Rural Poverty

A "Resolution on Promptly Resolving Poverty in the Countryside" was adopted by the Party Central Committee and the State Council on October 23, 1996 (though it was not announced in the official organ, the *People's Daily*, until two and a half months later). According to this document, in 1978, 29 years after the People's Republic was set up, those in the rural population living below the poverty line still numbered 260 million, which was 26% of the total population in China.

Why is it that one-third of the rural population still lived below the poverty line? Among some of the major reasons are policies pursued by the ruling Chinese Communist Party (CCP) of sacrificing peasant interests, such as suppressing the prices of agricultural products, prioritizing the development of heavy industry, and forced communalization in 1958 — which led to general impoverishment of the peasants and dwindling of peasants' enthusiasm in production.

Since 1979, when the "people's communes" began disintegrating, the enthusiasm of peasants began to rise, and many have had their livelihood improved. Later on, the CCP resolved to put an end to poverty by the end of the century. The October 1996 resolution mentioned above declared that the current rural population in poverty has been reduced to 65 million, i.e., 5.4% of the total population. If this is indeed the case, it would signify a great improvement.

However, this figure cannot be taken at face value, for it has long been the practice in China for officials at lower levels to falsely represent figures when reporting to their superiors. At the same time, the poverty line as defined by the state is RMB300 yuan, equivalent to US\$36, which is a mere 10% of the internationally defined poverty line of US\$370. Despite a lower living standard in China, compared to many other countries, an average income of 0.82 yuan (US10 cents) a day is definitely inadequate for subsistence. The high inflation of recent years has also rendered this figure unrealistic, statistically excluding many people who are living below subsistence levels.

The October 1996 resolution acknowledges that though the figure for people population living below the under subsistence level is growing smaller, the alleviation of poverty in this sector is getting more difficult. The reasons are: of the population now below the poverty line, about half is still far from the poverty line; and most of them reside in remote mountain areas or hinterland areas.

The central government says it will increase poverty alleviation funds by 1,500 million yuan every year starting from 1997, which should be spent on restoring farmland, building roads in the countryside, improving the supply of drinking water, and promoting training in science and technology. Another 3,000 million yuan of loans would be used on efficient, repayable projects such as farming, poultry, orchards, and the processing of agricultural goods.

It is difficult to say whether these funds to alleviate poverty will be appropriated for other uses, as has often happened in the past. The resolution also proposes that the masses need to be creative and self-reliant in their effort to resolve the question of poverty, thus shifting responsibility away from the government.

One reason for the slow improvement in the living standards of the rural population in central and western China is that the pro-market economic reform has caused the eastern coastal areas to develop quickly and to benefit from preferential investment policies. Investments into the central and western parts of China have been much less.

For instance, in 1994, the proportion between the eastern region and the central and western regions was: investments in fixed assets 65.83 : 34.17; investments in state owned sectors 59.07 : 40.93; investments in non-governmental sectors 71.18 : 28.82; investments from Hong Kong, Macao, and foreigners 83.50 : 16.50. The national average per capita investment in fixed assets was 1,314.46 yuan, with 2,119.24 yuan for the eastern region, and 759.15 yuan for the central and western regions. This means per capita investment in fixed assets in the eastern region was 1.79 times that of the central and western regions. The latter was only 73.1% of the national average.¹ The gaps in the GDP are

also increasing due to differential investments. In 1978, the proportion was 52.5 : 47.5; in 1994, it was 59.12 : 40.88.²

In recent years, the alarming discrepancies have drawn the attention of policy makers, who have been stressing the need to redress such discrepancies. However, as Shi Wei from the Economic Structure and Management Research Institute under the State Structural Reform Commission said, "Before the institutionalization of transfer payments, under the reform of the tariff structure, the western regions will encounter even more acute problems in capital shortage, inadequate investments, financial drain, and weak development...It is very difficult to expect the western regions to achieve effects and initiatives like those in the eastern regions in the transformation to market economy."³

Urban Poverty

Market reform has also led to increasing urban poverty. The urban poor are made up of the unemployed or semi-unemployed, plus the underprivileged, such as retirees, widowed old people, and the handicapped. Their hardships have been aggravated by the inability of enterprises to pay wages to the workers, inflation, and the lack of a comprehensive social security system.

It is reported that about 10 million people have joined the ranks of the unemployed due to the closure of factories and enterprises.⁴ Redundant staff from state-owned or collectively owned enterprises number around 30 million.⁵ According to one survey, over two-thirds of enterprises complained of underusage of resources, as a result of which 7 million workers were in a state of stoppage or semi-stoppage of work at the end of September 1996.⁶

In addition, in the last decade, the annual surplus labor in the cities (after deducting those with employment) was 3.6 million.⁷ In the "surplus labor" category in the countryside there were about 100 million persons, some already entering the urban labor market.

The increase in the number of unemployed also has to do with the increase in bankruptcy of enterprises. The figure in 1996 increased by 1.6 times compared to 1995 (from 2,385 in 1995

1. "Analysis of the increasing discrepancy between the eastern and the western regions," *Economic Studies*, No. 7, 1996.

2. *Ibid.*

3. "Regional discrepancies and prospects under the economic reform in China," *Economic Studies*, No. 9, 1995.

4. *Ming Pao*, January 9, 1997.

5. *China Economic Herald*, November 29, 1996.

6. State Statistics Bureau, "Economic Situation of 1996 and Prospects for 1997," *People's Daily*, January 23, 1997.

7. *China Economic Herald*, November 29, 1996.

to 6,232 in 1996; whereas the total of 1989 to 1995 was 5,395). Cao Siyuan, an expert on bankruptcy, anticipated that "if the government does not intervene, the number of bankruptcies in 1997 will be over 10,000."⁸

Due to the large reserve in the labor market, wages have been repressed. In many industries, workers are not paid even the state-regulated minimum wages. In Qinghai Province, some contract workers received only 80 yuan a month.⁹ The minimum wages in Gansu Province, with similar background and development level as Qinghai Province, was 140-148 yuan.

Even in Guangzhou, the fastest developing city under the market reform, social differentiations are very big. The latest survey by the Guangzhou General Labor Union showed that stranded worker families on their files numbered 1,615 (with per capita monthly income below 200 yuan), and families with per capita income below 100 yuan numbered 207. Also, 32 families were dependent on a retiree. (The minimum wages in Guangzhou was 380 yuan.)

Social and Class Differentiation

While the poor get poorer, the rich get richer. It is reported that less than 3% of the total popu-

lation hold a savings of 290 billion yuan, which is 28% of the savings of urban and rural residents. At present, 1 million people in China own property worth over 1 million yuan.¹⁰

Another report states that there are over 2 million millionaires in China today, and 16.1% of private entrepreneurs in the big cities have an annual income above 0.5 million yuan. In contrast, the national average income of urban residents in 1994 was 3,179 yuan, i.e., 265 yuan per month.¹¹ It should be noted that incomes from illicit sources or tax evasions are not documented in the official figures.

The central party leadership sees 1997 as a crucial year — with Hong Kong returning to China and with the 15th National Party Congress being convened. The CCP's No. 1 document of 1997 listed 10 major factors leading to social instability, three of which are related to rural and urban poverty:

- contradictions arising from gaps in development between different regions and gaps in income of different strata;
- resistance against the party and the government coming from large numbers of workers dismissed, gone into early retirement,

or waiting for reemployment under the reform of state-owned enterprises;

- aggravation of rural problems, and intensification of organized anti-government demonstrations, protests, petitions, and unrest.¹²

Radical Change Needed

The radical way to deal with rural and urban poverty is to drastically change policies detrimental to peasants' interests, give substantial aid to poverty-stricken households, and reverse the policy of "encouraging a small minority to enrich themselves." Workers must be true masters of the enterprises and in control of production before state-owned enterprises can reverse the wave of bankruptcies. Social security needs to be set up, and the people need to be organized to monitor and prevent social wealth from falling into the hands of a few. This requires a radical change of the bureaucratic system and the development of genuine workers' democracy. □

January 28, 1997

Guangdong, China

Labor Activists Face Heavy Prison Sentences

The following statement by Amnesty International was posted on the "labr.global" conference of the IGC computer network. It was dated December 24, 1996.

Amnesty International today called for intensified international pressure on China to release Li Wenming and Guo Baosheng, labor rights advocates and prisoners of conscience, who are facing heavy prison sentences in the booming southern Chinese province of Guangdong, bordering Hong Kong.

"Li Wenming and Guo Baosheng risk being sentenced to 10 years imprisonment or more, because of their support of workers' rights — peaceful activities which the government deems 'counter-revolutionary.'" Amnesty International said. "Convicting and sentencing the two men on these charges, just over six months before the return of Hong Kong to Chinese sovereignty, would further undermine confidence in the rule of law in Guangdong, and by implication in Hong Kong."

The two men were tried in Shenzhen, near Hong Kong, in November. They were reportedly found guilty of "plotting to overthrow the government," a crime punishable by at least 10 years imprisonment under China's criminal law. The two men had wanted to establish an independent labor union, and had spread information among workers about their rights.

The November trial in Shenzhen — where Hong Kong's unelected Provisional Legislature will sit until the territory's handover to China in July 1997 — attracted strong attention from the Hong Kong media. The trial was particularly significant because it involved defenders of workers' rights, in a province with a very high level of foreign investment in the industrial sector and a high economic growth rate.

The trial also appeared to some Hong Kong media to offer a measure of the Chinese authorities' concern to appease worries expressed in Hong Kong about future respect for the rule of law by China. Also, the trial was the first openly political one in Guangdong province since 1993.

In a rare move, the authorities did not announce the court's verdict at the end of the trial — possibly as a result of the pressure exerted on the government at that time. Amnesty International renews its call on China to release the two men immediately and unconditionally. It also urges that concern be expressed to the Chinese government that the continue detention of the two activists would have a negative impact on the human rights record in Guangdong province. □

8. *Ming Pao*, January 28, 1997.

9. "Regional discrepancies and prospects under the economic reform in China," *Economic Studies*, No. 9, 1995.

10. *Abstracts from Newspapers and Journals*, March 23, 1995.

11. *Reform*, No. 2, 1995.

12. *Ming Pao*, January 26, 1997.

Two May Day Parades?

Old Guard vs. Progressive Unions in Mexico

Reprint from *Mexican Labor News and Analysis*

The following excerpts are from *Mexican Labor News and Analysis*, Vol. II, No. 4, for February 16, 1997 (International Day of Solidarity with the EZLN)

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The UE Home Page, which displays *Mexican Labor News and Analysis* has an INDEX of back issues and an URGENT ACTION ALERT section.

Fidel Velazquez, head of the Confederation of Mexican Workers (CTM), recently called the Foro's principal public figure Francisco Hernandez Juarez, head of the telephone workers union, a "homosexual." This was Don Fidel's response to a question about Hernandez Juarez's remark that workers might punish the PRI by voting against it. (See below.) [Fidel Velazquez, notorious for his corrupt and authoritarian domination of the pro-government union federation, is nearly 100 years old, but refuses to relax the decades-old bureaucratic stranglehold on Mexican unions. The Foro is a group of more progressive and independent-minded union leaders that has emerged out of the upheavals of the past three years.]

[The Foro leader] Hernandez Juarez responded [to Fidel Velazquez's insult] with the Mexican saying, "To nasty words, turn deaf ears." "He's afraid of the progress being made by our new unionism," said Hernandez Juarez. The Foro group of unions ran displays ads in Mexico City newspapers giving full support to Hernandez Juarez.

Two May Day Marches?

The attempt to stigmatize Hernandez Juarez wasn't the CTM's only offensive. Velazquez also announced that the CTM and the Congress of Labor (CT) would march on May 1 in the traditional labor day parade this year. In 1995 and 1996 the CTM and the CT did not march, and the labor day parade was organized by more militant or independent groups. The CT has so far taken no official position, but the CTM headed by Velazquez is the most powerful federation in the Congress of Labor.

The Foro group of unions then announced that the Foro group and the 65 unions which participated in the National Union Meeting at the end of January were also organizing a May Day march.

What is not clear at this point is whether there will be one march with the dissidents attempting to participate in the official march, or two rival marches. In years past when independent unions attempted to march in the official march, or attempted to enter the Zocalo, the national plaza, before or after the official march they

were sometimes attacked by the CT or CTM unions or by the police.

In any case, it appears that the CTM and the Foro are on a collision course. May 1, 1997 could become a defining day for Mexico's unions and workers. [See: Arturo Cano, "Los Sindicatos en Juego," REFORMA's ENFOQUE magazine, 16 February 1997.]

Velazquez and CTM Continue to Support PRI, Attack Rivals

With Mexico's national elections approaching this summer, Fidel Velazquez, head of the Confederation of Mexican Workers (CTM), continued to support the ruling Institutional Revolution Party (PRI) and to attack its rivals.

Velazquez attacked Manuel Camacho Solis, former mayor of Mexico City, who had been expelled from the PRI and who recently announced the formation of a new Party of the Democratic Center, which will not, however, compete in elections until the year 2000. Velazquez said that Camacho's party represented no threat, and that the PRI had maintained its unity despite the departure of Camacho's supporters.

The CTM also sent out a letter to all of its constituent organizations, calling upon them to work for the victory of the PRI in the coming elections, since that party — it said — represents the country's masses, and its loss would result in "a chaos of unforeseeable consequences." The CTM also warned its members against voting for the conservative National Action Party (PAN) or the left-center Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD). The section of the letter discussing the opposition parties reads: "It is not strange that now the PAN, the party of the right, the anti-patriotic party, the party of conservatism, the party of religious intolerance and far-out individualism, and the PRD, the power-seekers, the opportunists and messianic visionaries, based on the most backward populism, the pseudo-democrats whose practice is authoritarian and who lead to ungovernable situations, without an ideology, are trying to win followers and voters with a confused political option."

Meanwhile Francisco Hernandez Juarez, while stating that the Foro group of unions would neither support nor attack any particular party, whether PRI, PAN, or PRD, predicted that many workers would vote against the PRI because it had failed to keep its promises.

FAT and May First Federation Criticize Inter-American Development Bank

Bertha Lujan, a leader of the Authentic Labor Front (FAT) and of the May First Inter-Union Federation, criticized the Inter-American Development Bank for attempting to force conservative reforms in Mexican labor legislation.

The Inter-American Development Bank has offered a \$500-million loan to Mexico, on the condition that the Zedillo government bring about labor law reforms. [Shades of South Korea.] The proposed reforms apparently include: abolition of the right to strike, no compensation for layoff or firing, employment by the hour (rather than by the 8-hour day and 48-hour week), and measures to promote efficiency and productivity.

The FAT and the May First Inter-Union Federation argue that the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the Inter-American Development Bank are promoting a "flexibilization of labor" which threatens labor unions and their contracts.

NAFTA Lowered Workers Wages

The Mexican Network on the Free Trade Agreement (RMALC) says that the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) resulted in a 32 percent fall in workers wages in three years.

According to Andrés Penalzoa of RMALC there was a fall in wages, salaries and benefits of 32 percent between 1993 and 1996. Penalzoa argues that the NAFTA labor side agreements should be included in the treaty itself, since they are too important to be excluded.

Unions in Spain Join International Day of Solidarity with Zapatista Army of National Liberation

Many Spanish labor union groups joined with non-governmental organizations, human rights groups and social movements in an international day of solidarity with the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN). The groups are demanding that the Mexican government fulfill its promises made in the San Andrés agreements signed one year ago. Many sections of the

Confederación General de Trabajo (CGT) of Spain, signed the solidarity letter which appeared in Mexican newspapers.

Survey Finds Support for Workers Rights

A survey published in *El Universal*, one of Mexico's oldest and most important newspapers, found that there was little support for

Mexico's unions, but a good deal of support for workers rights. (The results of the survey appeared in "Ovicio o caso del corporativismo, revela encuesta," *El Universal*, February 3, 1997, pages 1 and 12.)

The survey, carried out by Alduncin y Asociados, interviewed 622 persons, both men (55.6%) and women (44.4%) on the street in the State of Mexico (51%) and the Federal District (49%) in which Mexico City is located. The survey was carried out between January 17 and 23, 1997. Those interviewed were asked 18 questions about unions and related issues. The margin of statistical error is 4 percent with a 95 percent [reliability] level.

Here are some of the results:

70.9 percent of those surveyed said that Fidel Velazquez is more a symbol than a real presence.

89.4 percent felt that Fidel Velazquez should retire. (He is now 96 years old, cannot walk, and frequently falls asleep during meetings.)

70.7 percent felt that it was necessary that there be a renovation of Mexican labor unionism. (The figure was slightly lower among unionized workers interviewed, 69.4%; and higher in the general society, 73.3%.)

68.9 percent thought that union leaders sold out to employers. Almost two-thirds of those interviewed said that union leaders represent their own interests and not those of the workers.

But in terms of workers rights, note this:

65.6 percent believed that workers needed the right to strike in order to get just wages.

74.0 percent felt that employers should not be able to freely fire workers. □

The Workers Movement in Malaysia Today

Continued from page 16

Immigrant Workers

Q.: A recent and observable trend is the reliance upon and importance of migrant workers to the Malaysian economy, but the preoccupation of trade union leaders is to demand that the Government keep out "illegal" workers! What about this?

A.: This is a very important issue, which the MTUC has not responded to appropriately. There are an estimated two million migrant workers, largely from neighboring Southeast Asian countries like Indonesia, and domestics from the Philippines, but also workers from Bangladesh. Initially these workers came to do low-wage, casual jobs, like toiling on the plantations and in the construction industry and of course in the informal economy. However, they are now shifting to manufacturing.

When there was a shortage of labor in the late 1980s and early '90s, the trade union movement should have demanded labor rights, including better wages and working conditions, but they missed this opportunity. With the widespread use of migrant workers, salaries have become depressed.

There is friction between local and foreign workers, because one of the conditions of employment of migrant workers is the provision of

housing by their employers, which local workers have denied to them. Companies rent low-cost housing for migrant employees, depriving local workers of this limited housing stock and forcing them to rent private accommodation at an exorbitant rate. Now this is a social question and should be approached as such.

We welcome migrant workers into this country but at the same time they should be unionized, should receive the same benefits as locals, and the particular problems they face should be addressed.

This is a problem that is growing to explosive proportions. Migrant workers arrive in Malaysia in debt to the contractor or the labor agent to the tune of M\$5,000. And they are made to work more than 12 hours a day, including overtime, to repay this debt. However, productivity decreases because most of these workers, particularly those from Bangladesh, come from rural areas with no experience of industrial work and without the necessary skills. They are not trained and because of unsafe machinery and bad working conditions there are a high number of injuries and even deaths among these workers.

The fact that many are illegal and still enter the country shows that the employers want them. Sending them back is unfair. The progressive solution is to treat migrant workers as local workers and local workers as migrant workers!

There is no law preventing migrant workers from being unionized; they aren't allowed to hold office but they can be organized. Many Bangladeshi workers come with a history of struggle and are militant. It is not surprising that they don't want to join a passive union movement. But the MTUC has not made any effort to unionize them. It isn't the migrant workers who fear the MTUC, it is the other way about!

Regenerate the Union Movement

Q.: What then is the future of the trade union movement in Malaysia?

A.: We are at a crossroads. The choice is whether the labor movement can live out the dreams and aspirations that the early unions and their leaders had for it, and sacrificed their energies and lives for, or whether it will simply become an adjunct of the state. Unless the remnants of the progressive trade union movement can win leadership of the movement, while nurturing democratic tendencies within the unions and removing the corrupt, undemocratic leaders, we face a bleak future. In Malaysia the rank-and-file members are quite militant in their demands, but they receive little support from their leaders. We need the political will to regenerate the union movement. □

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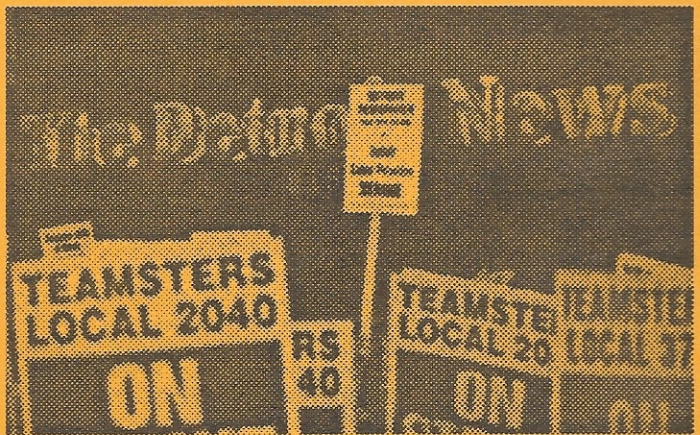
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