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Part One

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE LABOR QUESTION

**New Labor Press
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COMMENTARY

In order to understand the significance of “The Importance of the Labor Question”, it is important to understand the development of American communism and its relationship to the trade union movement. The liquidation of the Communist Party USA was justified in part with calls for “unity” with the anti-communist bureaucrats of the AFL and CIO, and unity with the class-collaborationist and state unionist policies of the FDR administration. Decades later, the Revolutionary Communist Party similarly tailed the trade union bureaucracy, although they later repudiated their reformist work in the trade unions by liquidating trade unionism altogether on the grounds that focusing on labor was “economist”. These two trends continue right up to the present day, with most so-called “communists” either tailing one or another faction of the state labor bureaucracy or simply writing off the labor movement as a whole for being hopelessly reactionary.

It is also important to note that this article was written after the New Labor Press took up line struggle against a number of groups in the labor movement. With the benefit of hindsight, it was noted that revisionists were attempting to conceal or justify their pandering to the liberal bourgeoisie in the labor movement by downplaying the significance of the trade union movement altogether. It is inconceivable that a Communist Party could take power without the aid of a powerful trade union movement. Yet how precisely this shift is to be accomplished in the current American labor movement—which is today completely subordinated to the aims of American imperialism—none of the revisionists can say. The fact that Lenin repeatedly emphasized the necessity for all-round collaboration between the Party and the trade unions, including in economic construction and military

affairs, and castigated Trotsky for “playing at the seizure of power” without the trade union masses is perpetually ignored by the revisionists. The question of reorganizing and extending the trade unions under a dictatorship of the proletariat, and how this is to be prepared under the bourgeois dictatorship, is equally ignored.

This type of ignorance is often accompanied by ignorance of the relationship between the trade union movement and Party construction at any phase of the revolutionary process. More often than not, the two are separated theoretically or even set in opposition to each other by revisionists in order to justify their practical (and theoretical!) opportunism in the workers movement. In reality, building the Party of the proletariat and the trade union movement are closely related. The trade unions are the most primitive organizations of the proletariat while the Party is its highest organization that leads all the others. Nevertheless they are both class organizations of the proletariat each with their own role to play in the seizure of political power by the proletariat. The Party has the responsibility of distinguishing between the reactionary trade union leaders and the revolutionary ones. Simply sweeping the question of our work as revolutionaries within the labor movement and the character of modern trade union leadership under the rug, or adopting the petty-bourgeois mindset of simply liquidating the trade union struggle across the board (usually on charges of “economism”) can only lead to isolation from the toiling masses, as demonstrated by the failures of the CPUSA, the Revolutionary Communist Party, and the dozens of other failed “vanguards” in the United States.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE LABOR QUESTION

Why is the Labor Question important for revolutionaries and class-conscious workers around the world, and especially important for revolutionaries and workers in countries like the United States? By “Labor Question” we mean the problem of elaborating a correct revolutionary position on a) the mass movement of the workers in their workplaces (the labor movement) and b) on the organizations which are, at least on paper, supposed to carry out that specific mass struggle for demands (the labor/trade unions). In our experience actually organizing workers, the question of why we should put particular emphasis on correctly understanding the labor movement has never come up. To them the importance of their struggles, and revolutionaries having correct analysis of and strategy in relation to their struggles, is self-evident. On the other hand, in line struggles with various “revolutionary” groups, the importance of holding a correct position on the Labor Question is continually downplayed as a secondary or marginal question in the modern context. In this article we hope to simply and plainly explain how the Labor Question is an essential question in our context because of the ways it is tied to the questions of making revolution in an industrialized country like the United States.

Because many of the most recent revolutionary peaks have occurred in semi-colonial and semi-feudal nations like China and Peru, where the peasantry was the main force of their New Democratic revolutions, and also because of the triumph of revisionism in the US Communist movement since at least the 1940s, a very simple truth about what the labor movement means to revolutionaries has been lost in our national context. For the longest time it was taken for granted that the International Communist Movement (ICM) was the direct historical product of the international labor movement, and that all proletarian revolutionaries needed to have a special focus on the labor movement and the trade unions in their work and when theoretically struggling over

the correct strategy in their own revolutions. It was Marx himself who referred to early revolutionary “party organizations and party journals of the working classes” as “the most advanced sons of labor” in his Inaugural Address to the first convention of the First Communist International. He elaborated further in a letter to another German comrade that:

“The political movement of the working class has as its object, of course, the conquest of political power for the working class, and for this it is naturally necessary that a previous organization of the working class, itself arising from their economic struggles, should have been developed up to a certain point.

On the other hand, however, every movement in which the working class comes out as a class against the ruling classes and attempts to force them by pressure from without is a political movement. For instance, the attempt in a particular factory or even a particular industry to force a shorter working day out of the capitalists by strikes, etc., is a purely economic movement. On the other hand the movement to force an eight-hour day, etc., law is a political movement. And in this way, out of the separate economic movements of the workers there grows up everywhere a political movement, that is to say a movement of the class, with the object of achieving its interests in a general form, in a form possessing a general social force of compulsion. If these movements presuppose a certain degree of previous organization, they are themselves equally a means of the development of this organization.” [Letter to Bolte]

Similarly in *Left-Wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder* Lenin wrote:

“The trade unions were a tremendous progressive step for the working class in the early days of capitalist development, inasmuch as they represented a

transition from the disunity and helplessness of the workers to the rudiments of class organization. When the highest form of proletarian class organization began to arise, viz., the revolutionary party of the proletariat (which will not deserve the name until it learns to bind the leaders with the class and the masses into one single indissoluble whole), the trade unions inevitably began to reveal certain reactionary features, a certain craft narrowness, a certain tendency to be nonpolitical, a certain inertness, etc. But the development of the proletariat did not, and could not, proceed anywhere in the world otherwise than through reciprocal action between them and the party of the working class. The conquest of political power by the proletariat is a gigantic forward step for the proletariat as a class, and the Party must more than ever and in a new way, not only in the old way, educate and guide the trade unions, at the same time bearing in mind that they are and will long remain an indispensable ‘school of Communism’ and a preparatory school that trains the proletarians to exercise their dictatorship, an indispensable organization of the workers for the gradual transfer of the management of the whole economic life of the country to the working class (and not to the separate trades), and later to all the working people.”

Thus, it is easy to see how for great theorists of our ideology like Marx and Lenin, the “political movement” of the industrial proletariat (Communism) and their “highest form of proletarian class organization” (the Party), were historical products of the “separate economic movements of the workers” in the factories and industries. This is why Lenin specifically referred to the International Communist Movement as “the class-conscious vanguard of the international labor movement”.

This did not mean, as the syndicalists argued, that the trade unions could lead the proletariat to revolution all on their own. For that purpose, the proletariat had created a new

higher leading political organization, “in its image and likeness” as Gonzalo wrote, the Communist Party. Instead it simply meant that proletarian revolutionaries should hold the labor movement “in mind” when organizing and theorizing the conquest of political power for the proletariat because the trade unions were the first, and remain the primary (in the sense of their primitiveness), economic organizations of the workers, and as such “will long remain an indispensable ‘school of Communism’ and a preparatory school that trains the proletarians to exercise their dictatorship, an indispensable organization of the workers for the gradual transfer of the management of the whole economic life of the country to the working class (and not to the separate trades), and later to all the working people” (*Left-Wing Communism*).

This point was well understood even in the famously exceptionalist United States, prior to Browder’s liquidation of the CPUSA. US anti-revisionist, and trade-unionist, leader Bill Dunne wrote in his preface to the US edition of the Red International of Labor Unions (the Comintern’s trade union arm) famous text *Problems of Strike Strategy*:

“Revolutionary strike strategy—the strategy which must be worked out and applied by the Trade Union Unity League and its affiliated unions—is designed to secure the victory of the working class both in its everyday “bread and butter” struggles and in the political struggles into which every serious economic conflict now develops almost from the first day of battle.

[...]

To carry out the greatest mobilization of workers for each separate conflict, to be able to mass the whole striking power of our class on the weakest point of the enemy front in decisive conflicts, to carry through the offensive and consolidate our gains—these are the tasks of a revolutionary strike strategy.

First and foremost our strike strategy must be such as to achieve the maximum immediate results from each separate struggle while guaranteeing that no struggle remains isolated from the general direction of the class struggle as a whole. It is here that the revolutionary unions of the Trade Union Unity League (T.U.U.L.) come into sharpest conflict with the opportunist conception of strike strategy within our own ranks, which sees immediate “gains” for workers from the standpoint of the social reformists. This conception makes a false and mechanical distinction between the daily economic interests of the masses and the revolutionary aims, of the working class as a whole, that must be brought forward in every struggle.

No such distinction exists except in the minds of those who see a contradiction between the struggle for the everyday economic demands and the revolutionary necessity of connecting them with the proletarian struggle for power.

The problem of building the revolutionary unions of the T.U.U.L.—the American Section of the Red International of Labor Unions—as well as the problem of building a mass Communist Party in the United States is largely a question of a correct strike strategy. With this is bound up the problem of destroying the reformist illusions of the American Federation of Labor and the social fascists of its Muste wing whose program is that of the Socialist Party.”

This recognition of the central importance of a correct position on the Labor Question as key to the “proletarian struggle for power” is maybe nowhere better seen in the resolutions and documents of the Third International itself, which outlined the essential need for revolutionaries and communists to have a correct understanding and approach towards the labor movement and trade union work specifically. For example, the Comintern’s Third Congress

conceived of the struggle for “partial demands” using the following principal formula: “the economic needs of the working masses must be steered toward a struggle for control of production – not as a scheme for bureaucratic organization of the economy under capitalism, but as a struggle against capitalism through factory councils and revolutionary trade unions”. Stalin, in his History of the CPSU(Bolshevik) wrote how in opposition to the Troskyites who sought to effectively liquidate the trade unions after the October Revolution: “Lenin and the Leninists drew up a platform of their own, entirely contrary in spirit to the platforms of the opposition groups. In this platform, the trade unions were defined as a school of administration, a school of management, a school of Communism.” This revolutionary Leninist position was expressed perhaps most directly and succinctly by the Comintern’s main red trade union leader A. Lozovsky who wrote in the pamphlet *Marx and the Trade Unions* (which should be read by every communist in the trade union movement):

“To define correctly the relationship between the economic and political struggle means to define correctly the relationship between the trade unions and the Party. While attaching tremendous significance to the economic struggle of the proletariat and the trade unions, Marx always stressed the primacy of politics over economics, i.e., stressed that which has been taken as a basis in the whole of the work of the Bolshevik Party and the Communist International.

When we speak about the primacy of politics over economics, it does not mean the turning of the trade unions into a political party or the adoption by the trade unions of a purely party program, or the abolition of all differences between the trade unions and the party. No, this is not what Marx said. Marx emphasized the significance of the trade unions as organizational centers for the broad working masses, and fought against piling the party and the trade unions into one

heap. He believed that the political and economic organizations of the proletariat have one and the same aim (the economic emancipation of the proletariat), but each applies its own specific methods in fighting for this aim. He understood primacy over economics in such a way that, in the first instance, he placed the political all-class tasks of the trade unions higher than the private corporative tasks, and secondly, that the political party of the proletariat must define the economic tasks and lead the trade union organization itself.”

It should be obvious by now that for the revolutionaries and communists of Marx, Lenin, and Stalin’s time, the Labor Question was essential in 1) their conception of where the international and domestic Communist organizations originated (the workers movement, in particular the labor movement), 2) their understanding of how the proletariat would struggle for and then conquer political power from the capitalists, 3) their understanding of how revolutionaries intervened in and lead the struggle for reforms and economic demands, and 4) how the workers were prepared for the tasks and victory of the dictatorship of the proletariat.

The big caveat here is that it was largely in the industrialized or imperialist nations that the Labor Question took central stage in relation to how the struggle for political power was realized, economic demands won, and the dictatorship of the proletariat managed and established. In nations where semi-feudal and semi-colonial conditions prevailed, these processes were conceived as the New Democratic revolution, which revolved around the anti-imperialist alliance of the peasantry, petite bourgeoisie, and national bourgeoisie, led by the proletariat which also served to resolve the Agrarian/Land question in these countries. When Gonzalo and Mao do not always write in the same terms regarding the Labor Question as Lenin, Marx or the Comintern did, it is not because they viewed the trade unions and labor movement as universally less important in Maoism, but that in their specific national semi-feudal and semi-colonial contexts the

process of people's war and revolution was conceived of as "a peasant war that follows the road of surrounding the cities from the countryside" (General Political Line of the PCP). This can be seen in how their universal contributions regarding the definition and construction of the third instrument, the United Front, are explicitly theorized as tightly bound up in the particular mass movements of each given country, which in some countries is primarily the agrarian movement and in other countries the labor movement.

Despite his context for example, Mao himself stated that even in the largely rural Jiangxi Soviet that the "[Jiangxi] Soviet workers are organized in their strong class trade union which is the pillar of the Soviet power". Moreover, the universal principles of their theoretical contributions, which include concepts like "the masses make history" and "people's war is a war of the masses and can only be accomplished by mobilizing the masses and relying on them", help demonstrate the importance of the Labor Question in an industrialized imperialist nation like the US. In Mao and Gonzalo's works, the principle remains that all revolutionary processes, whether they be the construction or reconstitution of the Communist Party or the preparation and course of people's wars, occur within and as part of the class struggle and among and connected with the masses. This can be seen in the PCP's conceptualization of the United Front serving as a central foundation for the construction of the New State during and after the period of people's war. In semi-colonial semi-feudal countries this meant that the people's war occurred within the context of the mass anti-imperialist movements and mass peasants movements, within the context of the Agrarian and Colonial Questions.

In a country like the US where there is no discernible peasantry, where the vast majority of people live in cities and towns and where even in the rural areas the agrarian production is organized along industrial capitalist lines rather than feudal lines, it is the proletariat which becomes

both the main and leading force. In our context our primary movement for economic demands is not the movement for land reform, but the real movement for demands at the point of production i.e. the labor movement. Thus, for proletarian revolutionaries in the United States, the Labor Question takes on the same central importance it did in the theory and literature of Marx and Lenin's time, but must now be combined and enhanced with new theoretical developments like the universality of people's war, concentric construction, the creation of the New State in the process of people's war, etc. Thus it is in the application of these universal components to their respective national contexts that material questions like the Labor Question emerge as vital and unavoidable, demonstrating how Marxism is a living science that cannot be reduced to abstract, lifeless, metaphysical dogma.

In the United States, owing to the extreme backwardness of the trade union movement, the application of these revolutionary ideas is severely resisted by the labor bureaucrats. Naturally, this class struggle is reflected in the struggle to reconstitute the Communist Party, through the refusal to break with state unionism, Trotskyism, labor-liberalism, and numerous other revisionist conceptions of the trade union struggle. The fact remains that the proletariat cannot organize socialism under the leadership of the bourgeoisie, which controls the labor movement in the United States through a number of state, semi-state, and non-state institutions, chief among them the National Labor Relations Board and the Department of Labor. The struggle between the revolutionary proletariat and the labor aristocracy is a fundamental Marxist idea, yet few people see the connection between the blind obedience to state-backed labor institutions that persists among the so-called "communist movement" in the US and the failure to reconstitute the Communist Party in the US.

It is worth noting that, according to Lenin, "Without close contacts with the trade unions, and without their energetic

support and devoted efforts, not only in economic, but also in military affairs, it would of course have been impossible for us to govern the country and to maintain the dictatorship for two and a half months, let alone two and a half years” (*Left-Wing Communism*).” The revisionists today are not bothered in the slightest by the military collaboration between the bourgeois intelligence agencies and law enforcement and the state union leadership, which was resoundingly rejected by the masses in June of 2020 when protesters attacked the AFL-CIO headquarters during a protest against police brutality. (About which then-President Richard Trumka said, “Attacks like the one on the AFL-CIO headquarters are senseless, disgraceful and only play into the hands of those who have oppressed workers of color for generations and detract from the peaceful, passionate protesters who are rightly bringing issues of racism to the forefront.”) Furthermore, Lenin said, “But now, precisely now, especially after the political revolution, which has transferred power to the proletariat, the time has come for the trade unions, as the broadest organization of the proletariat on a class scale, to play a very great role, to take the center of the political stage, to become, in a sense, the chief political organ. For all the old concepts and categories of politics have been upset and reversed by the political revolution which has turned power over to the proletariat” (*Report at the Second All-Russia Trade Union Congress*).” Thus, according to Lenin, the trade unions are absolutely critical both during and after the seizure of power by the proletariat. The revisionists preach the dying out of the class struggle, and thus they logically accept the dying out of the trade unions as organs of the class struggle, and their substitution with bureaucratic welfare schemes. Maoism, on the other hand, recognizes the intensification of the class struggle even under proletarian dictatorship, and thus Maoists logically demand the development of the trade unions, not simply as tools for struggling over “bread and butter” issues under capitalism, but as organizations of the proletariat that take on new political and economic responsibilities in the course of the revolution and socialist construction and cultural revolutions

that follow. It scarcely needs explaining that in order for the trade unions to play their critical role in the class struggle they require correct class leadership. This leadership is the party of the proletariat, the Communist Party.

This is why Maoists cannot accept the reduction of the labor question to that of a secondary, tactical issue to be decided at some later date. Attempts to dodge the question by refusing to differentiate between the representatives of the proletariat and the bourgeoisie in the trade union struggle, refusing to differentiate between revolutionary and counterrevolutionary trade unions, or simply failing to demarcate oneself from revisionism on the labor question means in fact betraying the revolutionary aim of the communist movement. With even the most basic review of our ideology, we can see how the Labor Question is tightly bound up in how major components of Marxism will be applied and practiced in our conditions, and is also a historically significant question which played a central role in the creation and development of the International Communist Movement. Not only is the labor movement and the trade unions strategically and tactically important to us. On a theoretical level, they are integral to applying universal concepts of Marxism, like party reconstitution/construction, to our national context.

Part Two

**WHY PERU?
MAOISM AND THE
AMERICAN LABOR
MOVEMENT**

**New Labor Press
March 11th 2024**

COMMENTARY

One of the earliest New Labor Press articles, this text took aim at the narrow nationalist outlook of the state unions which had been unconsciously adopted by the majority of communists in the labor movement. The relationship of the trade union movement to the seizure of power, the possibility of constructing new trade unions through the correct application of communist ideology, the organization for joint action of the toiling masses to win their demands—these were laid out plainly in the course of the Peruvian People’s War. Yet these lessons that were learned in the course of colossal sacrifices by the Peruvian workers have been completely written off by revisionists in the American labor movement who liquidate the internationalist responsibilities all workers should uphold.

And what has been accomplished by those who claim to know better than the Peruvians (or the Chinese and Russians before them)? Obviously nothing has been accomplished by the narrow “patriotic” leaders of the American labor movement and their lackeys. Not only is there no proletarian dictatorship in the US, not only are there no major independent (from the NLRB) class-conscious trade unions, there are not even strikes to win basic demands. Instead, there are sellout agreements and corporatist bargaining units. The trade union masses in the US are supposed to rest content with general inactivity marked by the occasional phony strikes put on by racketeers and embezzlers to secure wage garnishments (“obligatory dues”) and imperialist bribes for themselves and their supporters.

WHY PERU? MAOISM AND THE AMERICAN LABOR MOVEMENT

The reactionary, revisionist, and rightist opponents of the New Labor Press and similar organizations wail on and on about “Gonzaloites”, “outside agitators”, “antifa”, “Stalinists”, “sectarians”, and other red boogeymen in the labor movement. This red-baiting and fear-mongering is a plain admission, an act of demarcation, by these groups that they have zero interest in principled class struggle, theoretical consistency, or overthrowing the bourgeoisie permanently. It is an open declaration of war against the most advanced and consistently class-conscious workers. Red-baiting aside, though, this does raise a legitimate question. Even some of our friends might be perplexed by the importance we place on studying international developments and social movements in countries like Turkey, India, the Philippines, Brazil, and especially Peru. The importance of the Soviet Union, and Lenin and Stalin in the main, is easy to understand: it was the first workers’ and peasants’ state in the world, so logically the workers and peasants ought to study its practice and internal developments. China, too, was led by workers and peasants, and they successfully repulsed internal capitalist offensives for years until the Deng clique’s coup. But why Peru?

The United States is by far the most advanced country in the world considered from the standpoint of global political-economic influence. Its military, intelligence agencies, nongovernmental organizations, and its finance capital are nigh-unchallengeable on the world stage. Billions of people are persecuted in the name of American capital and even the European powers, highly developed in their own right, frequently subordinate their own imperialist machinations to the whims of the United States government. Peru, on the other hand, has a population that barely exceeds Texas, and its gross domestic product is actually less. It has had a series of sell-out comprador governments and is no stranger to

military juntas. Globally, Peru's influence is limited to tourism, the export of copper, etc. We live in the foremost imperialist power, whereas the Peruvians are stuck at the bottom of the imperialist ladder.

But it does not follow from these facts that the United States would have the most advanced labor movement in the world. If one accepts that the interests of capital and labor are antagonistic, and one also accepts that the government of the United States represents the interests of American capital, the only logical conclusion is that the US state is the premier enemy of the labor movement, domestically and internationally. And, since it has more resources at its disposal than any other state, the only logical deduction is that the labor movement in America would be among the most repressed, compromised, and backwards in the world. And this is precisely the situation we find ourselves in—why should we expect it to be any other way?

Was Peru chosen at random? It is true there are many poor countries containing billions of people. Bolivia is similar to Peru in a number of ways, it is even smaller population and GDP-wise. Venezuela, Colombia, Burkina Faso, one could cite a whole host of impoverished and oppressed states. But outside of the Soviet Union, China, and the states they directly worked to foment revolution in, not a single nation has seen the workers and peasants advance nearly as far as the workers and peasants of Peru did under the leadership of a Communist Party. The Communist Party of Peru (PCP) succeeded not only in wiping out the influence of the bourgeois state in vast areas—something which can be accomplished by anyone with enough firepower—but was able to reorganize production under the governance of the workers and peasants. In areas they controlled, the people ascended to power and the whole of society was revolutionized. In the areas the PCP fully controlled, people went from having nothing to determining everything. Meanwhile, in the framework of the official labor movement in the US, the workers cannot even decide what demands will

be put forward to the capitalists, much less seize political power.

In 1976, the Communist Party of Peru formed a national labor organization, the “Movimiento de Obreros y Trabajadores Clasistas” (MOTC), to organize workers and build revolutionary class consciousness among them. The MOTC organized workers from all sectors, but autoworkers, teachers, textile workers, nurses, miners, and other industrial and lower middle-class workers made up the majority of the organization. Not unlike the state unions of the US, the establishment state and business unions in Peru are and were filled with class traitors who sell out the interests of the working class to that of the bourgeoisie. The PCP called out the class collaborationist union bureaucracy and used the MOTC as an alternative to it. In stark contrast to the sell-out union bureaucracy, the PCP would sustain strikes until their demands were met, agree to shorter contracts that benefited workers, and would launch work stoppages whenever these contracts were broken.

As part of their strategic plan to surround the city from the countryside, the PCP focused on key industries along the central highway which connected Peru’s capital Lima to the rest of the country. In 1988, during the period of the first conference of the Communist Party of Peru, the “Comité de Lucha de Obreros y Trabajadores Clasistas de la Carretera Central (CLOTCCC)” was formed as part of the MOTC to further develop the work to creating alternative organizations to the business unions along the central highway. The PCP, through the MOTC, was able to establish a presence in almost all the major industries along the highway. The organization of workers enabled the party to shut down much of the transportation of goods to Lima. Such as the central highway strike of April 1991, where following the death of a worker in a shop the party was organized at, a two-day general strike occurred across the central highway.

As the people's war progressed, the party developed and employed the tactic of armed strikes, which combined mass general strikes with guerrilla actions to paralyze sections of the country for brief periods. In May of 1989, an armed strike was called which saw one million workers across Peru's mining and farming heartland refuse to work for three days. During this period, red flags would be raised across the country and the People's Guerrilla Army would conduct a barrage of different guerrilla actions. Between 1988 and 1992, nine armed strikes were organized in Lima and two strikes in areas near the city (Central Highway and Argentina Avenue). These armed strikes were not only effective, but were real demonstrations of the workers' will to control their workplaces and the absolutely critical work the PCP did to link the struggles of the workers and peasants to the seizure of political power.

The state unions, of course, deny the backwardness of the American labor movement and are resolutely opposed to any consistent application of principle or revolutionary theory. The defenders of the American state unions on the so-called "Left", for their part, go on and on about American material conditions, the need to apply "Marxism" or "Leninism" or "Maoism" to the particular situation in the US, and whine about the alleged importation of irrelevant formulas from other countries. Consciously or not, this is an attempt to reduce the scope of American workers. Is the problem that American workers are too internationalist, they are too willing to emulate their foreign counterparts when it comes to political struggle? Or, rather, is the problem that the American workers are ideologically and politically cut off from their foreign counterparts, and realizing that international unity spells their doom, a bunch of pseudointellectuals and renegades have taken up the line of American exceptionalism under the guise of "adapting to material conditions"?

And the fact that our foreign comrades have already nailed down the issue—the line of state unionism led to the creation

of Brazil's Workers' League all the way back in 1995—does this not make the work of the pseudointellectuals and renegades a hundred times more urgent and desperate? Does this not explain why they are suddenly realizing that the “old guard” such as Sean O'Brien in the IBT and Shawn Fain in the UAW are actually “militant” “rank-and-file” “democratic” “reformers”?

Let us simplify things. America is the foremost imperialist power, and consequently, the default state of its labor movement is extreme backwardness. Without a vast army of workers trained to fight against the slightest deviation towards opportunism, led by a Communist Party, capitalist domination of the labor movement is unavoidable. This is primarily reflected in the unions, even the spontaneously arising “independent” unions, trading basic labor union work for state bureaucratic work. At the same time, there are various imperialized countries, with wildly varying degrees of political development among the workers. The degree to which they have developed varies according to the greater or lesser degree to which the workers have correctly grasped their situation, the ideology of their class, and implemented a correct program. The greatest victories were achieved in Peru, owing to the uniqueness of Peruvian conditions and the correctness of their political line, which took Maoist ideology as its basis. The “hypothesis” of the NLP, if one can be said to exist, is that the backwardness of the American labor can be overcome only through the workers, and their supposed vanguard organizations, correctly elaborating and applying revolutionary theory to the conditions and practice of the proletariat and its allied classes in the workplace, at the point of production.

This is why, while the NLP does not shy away from its enemies, polemics are not and cannot be the majority of its content. Our goal is to unify labor behind correct ideas. To paraphrase Daniel de Leon, an obscure veteran of the earliest battles of organized labor in the US, truth alone unites. Consequently, the bulk of the NLP's content is educational,

and takes the form of guides and informational articles concerning the real state of affairs in the labor movement and what should be done. This is also why the NLP has an obligation to promote the study of Maoism. There is only one objective reality for our class, the proletariat, so there can only be one class truth and one class ideology. But the truth has different degrees of specificity, there is perceptual knowledge and there is conceptual knowledge, or as Mao called it, rational knowledge. So while the bulk of workers are not necessarily wrong, they are absolutely less right insofar as their knowledge has not reached the rational or conceptual level. Maoism is the highest development of rational knowledge produced by the struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie so far. It is not at all an accident that its origin was in the revolutionary struggles of China and Peru, where the chain of imperialism was weak.

While the do-nothings of the labor movement cry about importing foreign dogmas, on the contrary, we see ourselves as catching up to the latest scientific developments and applying them to our own circumstances. That is also why we reject the various schemes dug up from the sordid past of American opportunism and revisionism masquerading as “Communism”, especially the educational group and union caucus models. There is trade-union work, and there is not-trade-union work. The state unions and the various groups in their orbit are simply not doing trade-union work, and we believe it is important to expose this fact and also provide workers with the theoretical leadership and practical tools and support to do this work themselves. But even legitimate trade-union work will ultimately be pointless, if not counterproductive, if it is not lead by organizations guided by Maoism with the aim of seizing power for the workers and establishing their power globally through the violent overthrow of imperialism.

Part Three

STATE UNIONISM IN THE UNITED STATES

Contents:

Commentary

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**Southern New England Labor
Council**

COMMENTARY

This document essentially laid out the political line of the New Labor Press. It was written under the influence of labor line of the Brazilian Workers' League, who had formally broken with the state unionist trend in their country in the 1990s. The Brazilian workers, as well as other representatives of the *clasista* trade union movement in Latin America, continue to prove that breaking with state unionism is a prerequisite for an advance in the trade union movement, as they have successfully organized new trade unions since then in vital sectors such as metallurgy and construction. While state unionism is not an exclusively American phenomenon, in the US it has developed to an extent not seen in any other country with perhaps the exception of social-imperialist China. It was able to develop to this extent because of the treachery of the trade union bureaucrats (who have been in an anti-communist alliance with imperialism since the first World War), the revisionism of generations of supposed "revolutionary" leaders, and the unique position of American imperialism. The trade union bureaucracy in the US is the richest in the world, and collaboration with the state in exchange for guaranteed wage garnishments and legal protection from rival organizers (especially communists) was all too welcome. The unique role of the NLRB in certifying trade unions in exchange for being non-combative and anti-communist, plus the leading role of the Department of Labor as well as the Democratic Party, has created a trade union movement tightly bound up with the bourgeois state and US imperialist system.

Introduction

THE U.S. LABOR ARISTOCRACY AND THE ORIGINS OF THE “BORING FROM WITHIN” STRATEGY

What do Mary Kay Henry, Service Employees International Union (SEIU) president, Terence O’Sullivan, Laborers’ International Union of North America (LIUNA) president, and every AFL-CIO president since 1979 have in common, beyond being opportunistic bourgeois misleaders of their respective unions? Interestingly enough, none of them have actually spent any real amount of time working in the fields and sectors their unions claim to lead and represent. While it might sound strange or contradictory for an accountant, lawyer, economist, or business administrator by trade to lead a union that is supposed to represent proletarians, semi-proletarians, or the lower petty-bourgeoisie (teachers, nurses, etc.), it’s actually more common than you might think. At most, many modern union presidents have only worked in the sectors they supposedly represent for brief periods in high school, undergraduate, or right after graduation, and even then that is not always the case.

The examples go on and on. Terence O’Sullivan was a high school teacher and then owned an information technology company before becoming part of the professional organizing staff of the Laborers’ Union. Richard Trumka, leader of the United Mine Workers and AFL-CIO before his death, was a lawyer. Lee Saunders, president of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), is an economist. Many, like Marc Perrone, president of the United Food and Commercial Workers, Liz Shuler, current president of the AFL-CIO, Randi Weingarten, president of the American Federation of Teachers, or Teresa Romero, president of the United Farm Workers (UFW), are lifelong professional labor organizers who began working as staff in their respective unions straight out of college, without ever actually working in the sectors they claim to represent the interests of.

Traditionally, the establishment unions, like one of the predecessors of the AFL-CIO the American Federation of Labor (AFL), were characterized by revolutionaries as being led by what Lenin and Engels called the “labor aristocracy”. In *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism*, Lenin described how because of the “super-profits” generated by imperialist monopoly capitalism through its exploitation of the colonial and semi-colonial nations:

“[...] it is possible to bribe the labor leaders and the upper stratum of the labor aristocracy. And that is just what the capitalists of the “advanced” countries are doing: they are bribing them in a thousand different ways, direct and indirect, overt and covert.

This stratum of workers-turned-bourgeois, or the labor aristocracy, who are quite philistine in their mode of life, in the size of their earnings and in their entire outlook, is the principal prop of the Second International, and in our days, the principal social (not military) prop of the bourgeoisie. For they are the real agents of the bourgeoisie in the working-class movement, the labor lieutenants of the capitalist class, real vehicles of reformism and chauvinism. In the civil war between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie they inevitably, and in no small numbers, take the side of the bourgeoisie, the “Versaillese” against the “Communards”.

Unless the economic roots of this phenomenon are understood and its political and social significance is appreciated, not a step can be taken toward the solution of the practical problem of the communist movement and of the impending social revolution.”

In this way, Lenin (and Engels before him) argued that a section of the proletariat had been, in essence, “bribed” by the respective capitalist classes of the imperialist nations to function as agents of the bourgeoisie within the labor movement itself. This labor aristocracy then set about

creating a large strata of officials and bureaucrats within the major labor unions, the fate of which we will touch on later, and worked to limit the revolutionary consciousness of the workers, expel and isolate socialist and communist elements, and keep the labor movement focused on “bread-and-butter” economic goals rather than political goals that had to do with seizing state power for the working class. The complicated questions that arose from how to deal with this new section of “bourgeoisified” workers, and the reformist social fascist political parties they were associated with, defined a great deal of revolutionary strategy and debate in the imperialist core throughout the twentieth century.

In contrast to the “dual unionism” of the anarcho-syndicalists of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), after the October Revolution, the original strategy of American Communists within the US labor movement was to “bore from within” the establishment business unions rather than create their own independent “red” unions. The goal of this work was to slowly develop influence within the AFL, and eventually CIO, unions, consolidate their militant left-wing-opposition through the use of extra-union organizations like the Trade Union Educational League (TUEL), and eventually overthrow the labor aristocrats and “misleaders” at the top of the main business unions. Once the labor aristocrats and their bureaucratic officials were purged from the labor movement, the unions’ proletarian class leadership would be restored and they could once again become as Marx called “schools of war” in the struggle against capitalism.

In a brief summary that came with every pamphlet they printed, the TUEL described itself as:

“[...] a system of informal committees throughout the entire union movement, organized to infuse the mass with proletarian understanding and spirit. It is working for the closer affiliation and solidification of our existing craft unions until they have been

developed into industrial unions. Believing that all workers should stand together regardless of their social or other opinions, it is opposed to the common policy of radical and progressive-minded workers quitting the trade unions and starting rival organizations based upon ideal principles. That policy is one of the chief reasons why the American labor movement is not further advanced. Its principal effects are to destroy all radical organization in the old unions and to leave the reactionaries in undisputed control, The Trade Union Educational League is in no sense a dual union, nor is it affiliated with any such organization. It is purely an educational body of militants within existing mass unions, who are seeking through the application of modern methods to bring the policies and structure of the labor movement into harmony with present day economic conditions. It bespeaks the active cooperation of all militant union workers”

Not every member of the Comintern adhered to this strategy, as evidenced by the split between the Christian democratic and socialist/communist labor unions in imperialist countries like Italy, Spain and France. Indeed eventually, during the Third Period, the CPUSA was pushed by the Red International of Labor Unions (Profintern/RILU) to abandon the “boring from within” strategy given its lack of results, despite nearly a decade of work, and form independent “red” unions under the umbrella of the new Trade Union Unity League (TUUL). Even before the strategic shift of the Third Period, there had been opposition to the CPUSA’s policy of mainly limiting itself to work within the AFL.

From his exile in the Soviet Union, famous former IWW leader and Communist “Big” Bill Haywood wrote in a letter:

“The remedy for Bankruptcy is not the TUEL confining itself to the AFL or part of the Working Class. If so, what becomes of the revolutionary slogan “To the

Masses! To the Masses!" Where are the unorganized? What about the colored race ... In the national trades what has become of the great basic industries, agriculture and oil? Agriculture is primal [sic]. Are they to be lumped in the miscellaneous trades, with the unions of feather strippers and coconut crackers?"

Haywood's reference to the "colored race" comes from the fact that the AFL unions were as a rule segregated or prohibited non-white membership outright. It is not a coincidence that the CPUSA formed their famous Sharecroppers Union in the US South during the TUUL period, when by breaking with the AFL they also fully broke with racial segregationism. Furthermore, the TUUL's largest section was always its Needle Trades Workers Industrial Union, whose mostly female textile and garment workers had also struggled under the misogynist leadership of Samuel Gompers' AFL.

In an early echo of the rank-and-file caucus strategy to come, during the "boring from within" TUEL period the CPUSA had run a series of left-wing opposition candidates in opposition to the reactionary labor aristocratic leaders who controlled the establishment business unions. After their "Save the Union" slate failed to win against arch-opportunist leader of the United Mine Workers John Lewis despite a number of serious defeats the UMW had recently suffered under his leadership, secretary of the RILU and veteran Bolshevik A. Lozovsky wrote to CPUSA chairman William Z. Foster:

"THE QUESTION OF SETTING UP AN INDEPENDENT UNION MUST BE RAISED,

otherwise you will never escape from this vicious circle. You may have 99 percent of the votes but if the secretaries under Lewis [tear] up your ballot-slips, make fictitious ones, bring hirelings to the Congress, you will have to remain in the power of Lewis to the end of time."

It is worth noting this letter was sent in 1927, a year before the Comintern officially adopted the resolutions of the Third Period against social fascism which produced the turn towards independent “red” unionism in the US.

In the US context, the pre-WW1 Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) and 1928-1933 Trade Union Unity League mark the only times where independent “red” unionism would be the dominant tactic among the US revolutionary left. Except for the small five year TUUL period, from the end of the end of World War 1 until now the American Left has basically pursued different variations of William Foster’s original “boring from within” strategy.

Although inspired by workers organizations outside the establishment business unions, like the Revolutionary Union Movement organizations and League of Revolutionary Black Workers, the militants of the 1970s New Communist Movement in the U.S. generally embraced the Fosterite strategy of developing forces within the establishment unions in order to take them over. For example, in response to a letter questioning why they don’t “take the lead in forming an entirely new labor movement” the pro-Deng Communist Party (Marxist-Leninist), which was the second largest so-called Communist Party in the US at the time after the Revolutionary Communist Party (RCP), wrote:

“The CPML is opposed to the idea of abandoning the existing trade unions and instead of building new, independent or “pure” union organizations.

It is true as you say that the trade unions today are completely under the domination of reactionary misleaders who employ a powerful bureaucratic machine to suppress the rank and file. The Meanys, McBrides and Frasers are bought-and-paid-for agents of the bosses within the workers’ movement, whose job it is to preach narrow reforms while keeping the system of exploitation and wage-slavery intact.

But, on the other hand, there are nearly 20 million workers in U.S. trade unions, and these workers are concentrated in the most basic industries. Their struggles set the pace for the whole working class.

The importance of the trade unions lies in the fact that they are the most basic and accessible mass organizations of the working class. All workers, regardless of their level of political consciousness, can and do unite in unions to wage common struggles against the bosses.

Under class conscious rather than class-collaborationist leadership, unions could organize the 80 million unorganized workers and be an even more powerful force against the capitalists.

“It is the task of the Party,” states the Program of the CPML, “to win the broad masses of workers in the trade unions to socialist revolution and communist leadership.” We can’t do this standing on the sidelines of the workers’ existing organizations.

Our policy is to work within the unions and mobilize the masses to drive out the corrupt labor bureaucrats. We direct our main blow politically at these reformist and revisionist traitors, exposing them to the workers on the basis of their own experiences.”

From the perspective of the CPML, and their NCM descendants like FRSSO, despite their reactionary leadership and the ideological, political and organizational dominance of the labor aristocracy within them, the unions remained “the most basic, comprehensive organizations of the workers. We build them, defend them from capitalist attack and fight to transform them into organizations of class struggle. In the course of organizing in the shops and unions, we strive to win the broad masses of workers to see the need for socialist revolution and communist leadership.” This line was generally referred to as the “class struggle

unionism” line, and in many ways remains the default line among American “revolutionaries”, anti-revisionist and revisionist alike, to this day.

The RCP of the time pursued a similar route, seeking to form a new TUEL-like organization called the National Workers Organization. While accused by groups like the CPML of practicing “dual unionism” by forming a national “intermediate workers organization”, the NWO was very clear in its founding document that:

“The general problem with the unions today is not that the unions are no good and the working class needs new ones in their place. The problem with the unions is that the top

leadership is hopelessly reactionary and wedded to the owning class. These jackanapes need to be cleared out and replaced by officials who are going to lead the workers in fighting the companies. The national workers organization sets this as one of its tasks and not the destruction of the existing unions.”

Ironically, once the strike waves and spontaneous labor militancy of the 1970s ebbed and ended, almost right after they created the NWO, the RCP would exit the labor movement and trade union struggle almost entirely in the 1980s, and looking back claim that most of their 70s labor work was economistic, rightist and “workerist”. Those NCM militants who remained in the labor movement either ended up joining the very labor aristocracy they had once condemned, and played a major role in Jesse Jackson’s 1984 and 1988 Democratic presidential primary campaigns, or slowly faded into irrelevance.

Despite the collapse of the NCM, Trotskyist labor organizer Kim Moody would keep the “boring from within” strategy alive, although it was now called the “Rank and File Strategy”, and fell under the umbrella of a new organization/publication called Labor Notes. With Labor

Notes, Moody and his co-founders wanted to create a new TUEL, but without the explicit connection to revolution or a proletarian vanguard party that the original TUEL or the RCP's National Workers Organization had had. Instead of further revolutionizing an already spontaneously militant and insurgent labor movement, Labor Notes would seek to "revitalize" a now stagnant and declining US labor movement by organizationally linking a network of various "rank and file opposition" caucuses within the establishment unions and supporting their slates during union officer elections. The publication and its associated network of labor activists, which still exist to this day, has become the preeminent "progressive" labor organization in the country, in particular among the DSA and other "left" Democrats.

Thus, the American revolutionary left has pursued a "boring from within" strategy within the labor movement for, with the exception of a brief break during the Third Period, now more than a century. In a never-ending saga, like Sisyphus, would-be US revolutionary workers and labor activists have been attempting to drive out the reactionary labor aristocratic leadership from the establishment trade and industrial unions in an almost unbroken line from 1921 until now.

Why have these efforts failed to produce anything meaningful, outside of a few formerly "red" unions of the old 1930s CIO like the UE and ILWU who pride themselves on their "militant radical past"?

Why have the programs of even the "left-wing oppositional caucuses" devolved from supporting World Proletarian Revolution, to supporting any union officer, no matter their political beliefs, who will promise to not concede "too much" during the next round of contract negotiations?

While the answers to these questions are obviously complicated, and generally tied to broader questions about revolutionary struggle in our context and why generations of communists in the imperial core have failed to make

progress towards the conquest of political power, they are in any case fundamentally tied to the question of the character of the establishment unions. Specifically what their class character is, what our relationship to them should be, and thus what our strategy and tactics for work should be within the labor movement.

**UNDERSTANDING AND APPLYING THE “STATE
UNIONISM” ANALYSIS TO THE U.S.**

Unlike their North American counterparts, many Brazilian revolutionary labor activists generally use the term “state” rather than “business” unionism to describe their current establishment union centers. The Workers’ League (Liga Operaria), an independent trade union center supported by the Communist Party of Brazil [formerly CPB(Red Fraction)], describes the history of state unionism in Brazil in the documents from their 2006 Third Congress:

“As a result of a split in the ruling classes, the Vargas State sought, in a first phase, to control the labor and trade union movement by bringing it into the state apparatus. One of its first measures was the creation of the Ministry of Labor in 1930, with the clear objective of elaborating a trade union policy aimed at containing the working class within the limits of the state and to formulate a policy of conciliation between capital and labor. The aim of the "unionization law" of 1931 (Decree 19.770) which, contrary to the freedom of trade union association that existed at the beginning of the association at the beginning of the 20th century, created the pillars of state unionism in Brazil. Trade unions were recognized and made official by the Government, and in order to obtain "legal status" and represent the working class, they needed not only to be registered in a registration in a notary's office, they also needed to be recognized by the Ministry of Labour. The law prohibited all "ideological propaganda" (read communist) in trade unions.

In the presentation of the unionization decree, Lindolfo Collor, first Minister of Labor of the Vargas government, said: ‘The unions or associations of classes will be matters of their immediate prerogative, under the cautious eyes of the State’ and at a rally

attended by workers and trade unionists in São Paulo in June 1931, he said: 'It is high time to replace the old, negative concept of class struggle with the new, constructive and organic concept of class collaboration'. The decree also established the Ministry of Labor's financial control over the resources of the unions, prohibiting their use by workers during strikes and defined the union as an organ of collaboration and cooperation with the state. It allowed delegates of the Ministry of Labor the right to participate in workers' assemblies, prohibited the development of political and ideological activities within the trade unions, prohibited their affiliation to international trade union organizations, denied the right to unionize to civil servants, and limited the participation of foreign workers in trade unions, since a good part of the combative workers' leadership was still of foreign origin in those days. It can be said that the only favorable to the working class in this law - defined by the workers as "a summary of the 'Carta Del Lavoro' of Italian fascism" - was to guarantee unity. For the rest, it tied the unions to the state.

[...]

Towards constructing a class-conscious [classista], combative and independent unionism

The Workers' League emerged from our break with state unionism in September 1995.

The Workers' League was formed at its first Congress held in March 1997. It has marked its existence by the defense of the class-conscious and combative struggle and by the relentless fight against opportunism, corporatism, class collaboration, legalism and pacifism so characteristic of this old and bankrupt Brazilian trade unionism, represented by the current trade union centers.

The prospects for the growth of red trade unionism are very promising with the working masses of our country. The condition for this is to fight always to our revolutionary and class-conscious principles, always putting the interests of the masses at the forefront, the interests of the poor and oppressed masses of our country, serving the struggle of the workers at the world level."

The implication of this analysis of the character of the establishment unions, shared by many Latin American Marxist-Leninist-Maoists in their respective countries as well, is much more profound than it might appear at first glance. In this analysis, the establishment unions are not the "basic organizations of the workers", fundamentally proletarian structures, but with an upper layer of reactionary labor aristocrats controlling them which must be driven out. Instead, the once "basic organizations of the proletariat" have become incorporated into the bourgeois state itself, and are now tied at the hip with the bourgeoisie through their state apparatus. As in fascist Italy and Nazi Germany, these "unions" are now more like domesticated state-sanctioned workers associations rather than the spontaneous creations of "free labor" as Marx described them. While the majority of their members are still workers, the state unions derive their structure, leadership, and legitimacy from the bourgeois state's administrative apparatus and legal system, not from the workers themselves, their supposed "membership".

Although the analysis of Latin American revolutionaries like the Liga Operaria certainly stems from their broader conception of "bureaucratic capitalism" being the primary mode of production in their semi-colonial context, it is still relevant to an advanced industrial imperialist capitalist nation like the United States. One needs not go farther than the National Labor Relations Act of 1935 (or Wagner Act), which established the modern National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) system, for proof of the similarity between the establishment of the Brazilian state unions and our own state

bureaucratic labor apparatus.

In its opening section, the National Labor Relations Act states its purpose as: “AN ACT To diminish the causes of labor disputes burdening or obstructing interstate and foreign commerce, to create a National Labor Relations Board, and for other purposes.” It goes on further to describe how:

“Experience has proved that protection by law of the right of employees to organize and bargain collectively safeguards commerce from injury, impairment, or interruption, and promotes the flow of commerce by removing certain recognized sources of industrial strife and unrest, by encouraging practices fundamental to the friendly adjustment of industrial disputes arising out of differences as to wages, hours, or other working conditions, and by restoring equality of bargaining power between employers and employees.

Experience has further demonstrated that certain practices by some labor organizations, their officers, and members have the intent or the necessary effect of burdening or obstructing commerce by preventing the free flow of goods in such commerce through strikes and other forms of industrial unrest or through concerted activities which impair the interest of the public in the free flow of such commerce. The elimination of such practices is a necessary condition to the assurance of the rights herein guaranteed

It is declared to be the policy of the United States to eliminate the causes of certain substantial obstructions to the free flow of commerce and to mitigate and eliminate these obstructions when they have occurred by encouraging the practice and procedure of collective bargaining and by protecting the exercise by workers of full freedom of association, self-organization, and designation of representatives

of their own choosing, for the purpose of negotiating the terms and conditions of their employment or other mutual aid or protection.”

In this way, during a period of profound economic and social crisis, the bourgeois state under the FDR administration created the NLRB in order to establish a state regulatory system, and associated administrative apparatus and body of labor law, that would incorporate the establishment business unions of the time as a constituent part of the bourgeois democratic state. The bourgeois state would provide these unions with official legal status provided that they played by the rules of the new state-regulated collective bargaining system, limited the militancy of their members, and as the infamous Taft-Hartley bill later established, purged their ranks of all “anti-American” and politically “subversive” elements. These US state unions would now derive their ability to collectively bargain through bourgeois labor law and their recognition by the NLRB, not through the independent and spontaneous actions and demands of the workers themselves. Thus, in the decades following the formal recognition and reconciliation between establishment labor and capitalism mediated through bourgeois legislation and the courts, the fate of the major unions became wedded to the strength and health of the bourgeois democratic state, and in particular its counter insurgency welfare arm.

The state unions of the European fascist governments were in many ways simply advanced manifestations of a broader trend developing in all bourgeois states, even bourgeois democratic ones like the United States, towards corporatism and a stronger more-developed repressive apparatus (sometimes referred to as the increasing “reactionization” of bourgeois governments). This trend is in turn a symptom of the shift from the original chaotic “market capitalism” of Marx’s time to the imperialist monopoly capitalism Lenin described as ascendant in his era.

**THE STRUCTURE OF AMERICAN “STATE
UNIONISM”**

Obviously the transformation of the establishment unions from basic organization of the workers dominated by the labor aristocracy (a business union) to appendage of the bourgeois democratic state (a state union) did not happen over night. Indeed the transition seems to have been slow, occurring over decades, such that year by year the difference was difficult to notice and that only by looking back and comparing the major unions of the early twentieth century with the major unions of today we can really see the differences and distinctions emerge.

While generally capitalistic, or at most social democratic, in their thinking, it cannot be denied the labor leaders of the pre- and immediate post-war (1900s-1950s) American labor movement were by and large products of the spontaneous workers movement. John L. Lewis, Samuel Gompers, Margaret Haley, etc. were all labor aristocrats, bourgeoisified workers who had sold out the members of their unions for political and economic privileges. Nevertheless, they on some level objectively originated from within the working class and had spent a significant amount of time as wage laborers before being bought-out and becoming bourgeois labor lieutenants and union officers.

By the 1960s-1980s however, during the beginning of the great “crisis of organized labor”, a new strata of so-called “labor leaders” began to emerge that did not originate from the conservative sections of the working class, the labor aristocracy, but instead came directly from the legions of internal union staffers, “labor relations specialists”, lawyers, bureaucratic labor regulators, labor economists, researchers and union accountants that had ballooned in number following the passage of the Wagner and Taft-Hartley Acts. They were business administration, political science, economics, labor relations, and law graduates from some of

the most prestigious American universities, and they went straight from college to working as staff, lobbyists or consultants to major American business unions. At most they worked a token few years within a given field or enterprise before being promoted to full-time paid organizing staff.

They worked their way up internally within the newly consolidated ladder of union bureaucracy and committee positions that now ran the establishment unions. They protected their own interests and continuously multiplied, forming layers upon layers of internal union structures and bureaucratic features. The governance committees, departments, and organizing staff of all the major unions were now dominated by a strata of thoroughly petty bourgeois and bourgeois professionals who derived their legitimacy not from their experience organizing their fellow co-workers and laborers, but from their knowledge of, relation to, and ability to influence the courts, NLRB, Labor Department, and other assorted labor regulatory processes and structures of the bourgeois state. By the 2010s, the major unions would employ an army of around 100,000 organizers, accountants, researchers, staffers, and other assorted professionals outside and above the already large array of elected union officers and agents.

Much like the staffers of the NGO-complex which developed in parallel during the same time period among the urban and rural poor, the primary concern of this professional strata that now controls the major establishment unions is not even the growth or strength of the mainstream labor movement, but whether or not their unions are in compliance with federal financial and labor regulatory rules and whether or not they have the support of the bourgeois political class. Workplace agitation and organizing takes a backseat to electoralism and federal lobbying. Effective use of spontaneous walkouts, political and solidarity strikes, and industry-wide organizing is turned in at the door of NLRB-controlled collective bargaining system in favor of limited “unfair labor practice strikes”, no strike clauses during the

duration of a given contract, and the role of the union as the ultimate “contract enforcer.”

A simple analysis of the structure of a major modern union, like the United Auto Workers (UAW), reveals the scope of this new strata. The UAW lists on their website twenty-seven different professionalized departments under the jurisdiction of the union executive leadership (Accounting, Arbitration, Auditing, Circulation, Civil Rights, Community Action Program, Community Services, Conservation and Resource Development, Consumer Affairs, Education, Governmental and International Affairs, Health and Safety, Information Systems, Legal, Legislative, Organizing, Public Relations and Publications, Purchasing and Supply, Recreation and Leisure-Time Activities, Research, Research Library, Retired Workers, Time Study and Engineering, Social Security, Strike Assistance, Veterans, and Women’s), the majority of which are oriented towards the legislative, welfare and legal arms of the bourgeois state rather than towards their supposed “members”, i.e. the workers themselves.

The finances and expenditures of the major establishment unions also gives us a view into the shifting role and function of the former “basic organizations of the proletariat”, where instead of using their resources to grow the activity and organization of the workers, they increasingly spend more and more money on state-sanctioned bribery and lobbying. For example, according to campaign finance website OpenSecrets, which only has data going back to 1990, national and state teachers unions gave a total of

\$4,780,443 in political contributions during the 1992 presidential campaign. By the last presidential campaign, 2020, this number had ballooned to \$66,440,967. Instead of increasing strike benefits, expanding their operations, incorporating and training up a new generation of “rank-and-file” labor activists, and generally engaging in the class struggle, the modern establishment unions now spend hundreds of millions of dollars of the workers’ own money

each year on political favors and lobbying in the halls of the bourgeois democratic state.

Even though this vast misappropriation and channeling of the workers' money into the pockets of bourgeois politicians is often chocked up to the poor decision making and ill deeds of a few select "misleaders" at the top, the reality is that dividing the broader professional strata of labor staffers and the individual locals of major unions from their central leaderships, because they are somehow more "grassroots" and "proletarianized" than their higher-ups, misses the forest for the trees. The labor aristocracy and the bourgeois state they serve, in combination with the broader trends and transformations of American imperialist capitalism in the last century, have reshaped and restructured the major establishment unions into fundamentally class collaborationist state institutions.

While the development and dominance of the new strata of bourgeois and petty bourgeois professionals who now lead, control, and spend the resources of the labor movement is an undeniable manifestation of this transformation, the fundamental mechanism for the transformation of the establishment unions into unrecognizable bourgeoisified state workers associations is the "union-management collaboration"/contract system enshrined and institutionalized by the National Labor Relations Act and NLRB system. In their pamphlet "Mass Organization At The Workplace" NCM group Sojourner Truth Organization explains at length the existence and effects of what they call the "contract unionism" system:

"All existing unions accept the contract system, in which labor and management agree to certain terms of employment for a specified time period. In a contract, management agrees to provide a certain standard of wages, fringe benefits and working conditions. The union, for its part, agrees to keep its members working under the agreed terms. The ability

of a union to secure a favorable contract depends on two things: first, its ability to stop production during the period of negotiations, and second, its ability to prevent interruptions in, production during the life of the contract.

Thus, the nature of the contract demands that the union do what no workers organization should ever do - maintain labor discipline for the boss. The unions become part of the companies disciplinary apparatus, present at every point of grievance in order to prevent any disruption of production. That this mediating function of the union is well understood by the employers can be seen in the fact that virtually any time a group of workers in an auto plant or steel mill ceases work in protest over some grievance, the foreman or supervisor rushes to call the union officials to persuade the workers to resume production. This explains why the institution of company paid grievance time for union officials has been so generally accepted in basic industry, so that, while there may occasionally be haggling over the amount of time spent by various officials on 'union business,' the basic principle is never questioned.

At the heart of the union's regulatory role is the grievance procedure, which establishes legal channels for resolving contractual disputes, and thereby makes direct action by the workers 'illegal.' behind the grievance procedure is the arbitration machinery, which has built-in conditions reinforcing collaboration with the employer.

Even the ability of a union to fight at contract time - in theory the time when there are no restraints - is limited by its acceptance of the contract system. For example, employers are able to prepare for strikes by building up inventories during the last months of a contract - often aided by contractual provisions for

compulsory overtime. The unions are forced to accumulate huge treasuries to sustain long strikes, which have become increasingly difficult to win when the employer is a large monopoly rather than a small family business. In addition, these treasuries make the union more vulnerable to injunctions and legal suits over the use of mass picketing, boycotts and other traditional weapons of labor struggle. They also make the unions into banks, insurance companies and real estate holders, whose interests, to say the least, are not the same as the class interests of their members.

[...]

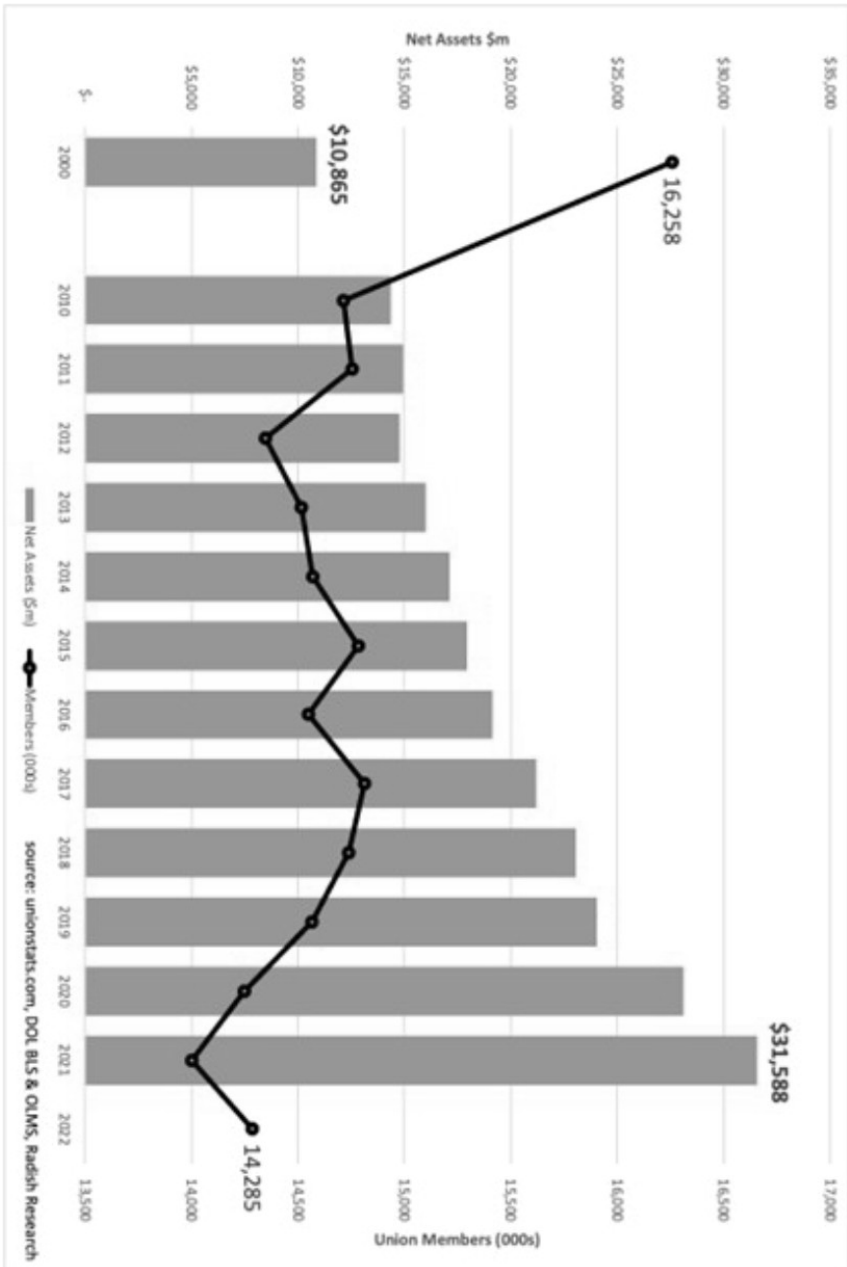
We could go on and on. But the point is that every one of the great gains of the CIO drive to organize the mass production industries - seniority, the grievance procedure, the written contract, dues check-off, paid time for officials - has been transformed into a means of strengthening the authority of management. It is not possible in this paper to review the steps in this transformation. For now, it is enough to note that the regulating role which unions, to some degree, always fulfilled has become their dominant aspect.

It is easy to cry 'sell-out' at the typical labor agreement. Certainly sell-outs are common. But the root of the problem does not lie in bad leadership or even bad policy, but in the institution of the contract itself. Indeed, one could well argue that the more conscientiously, within its own lights, the union defends the contractual interests of its members the more firmly it 'rivets the laborer to capital' as 'the wedges of Vulcan did Prometheus to the rock.'"

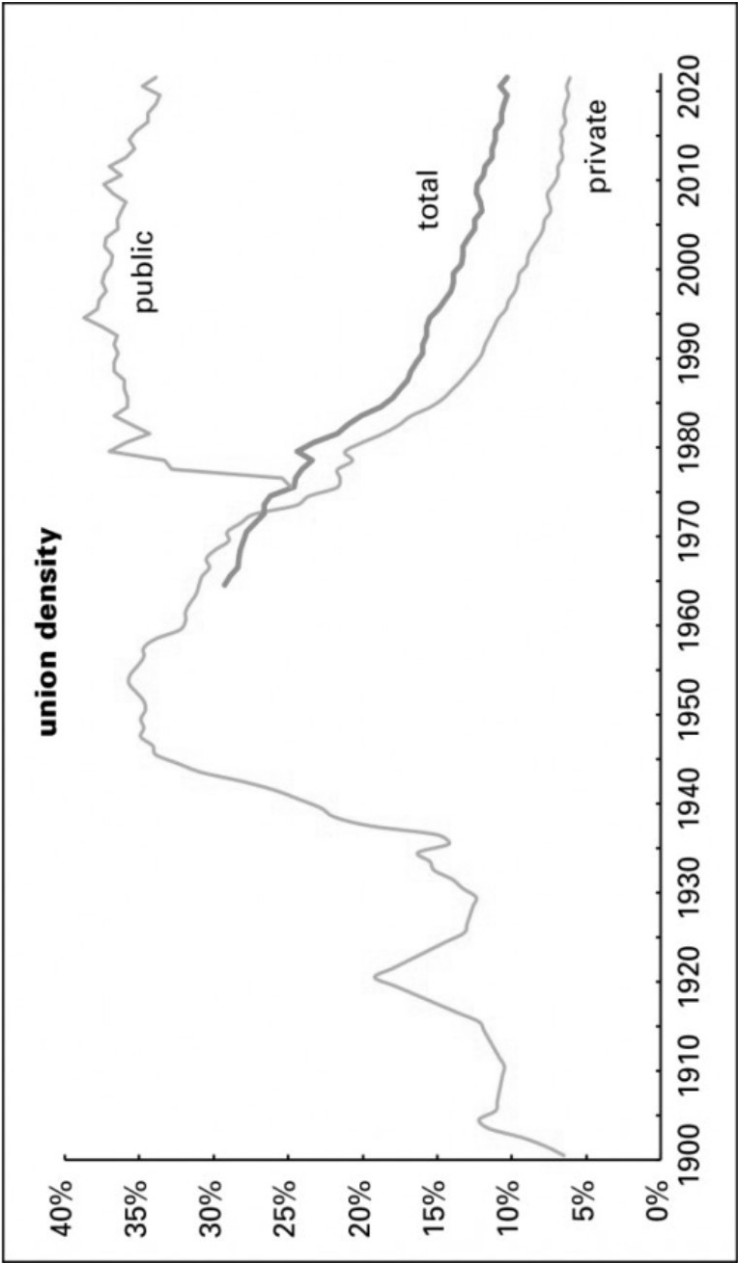
Although the Sojourner Truth Organization was describing the function of the establishment unions within heavy industry, and we view their complete opposition to all contracts or written agreements with employers as an ultra-left error, in our organization's experience with the grievance

procedure and prevailing contract system within the education and logistics sectors much of this description rings true. For example, the “Association Representative Handbook” given to Massachusetts Teachers Association elected officers, which is ironically considered a more “militant union” that has been under the control of its “left-wing rank-and file caucus” for nearly a decade now, devotes fifteen pages to “representative as contract enforcer” and only a half page to “representative as organizer”. Within the IBT and other more proletarian/industrial sectors, the enforcement of job seniority, part-time versus full-time distinctions, and other contract-linked divisions often make the union more akin to a “second supervisor” than an authentic representative of the workers.

The section about how establishment unions increasingly take on the features of banks, insurance- providers and capitalistic asset managers is also very prescient. A 2022 report entitled “Labor’s Fortress of Finance” meticulously describes how the establishment unions’ wealth and assets have reached ever souring heights, despite the fact the number of workers they encompass reach ever greater lows. According to this report, outside of their significant pension funds, in 2021 the major unions held a combined \$31,588,000,000 in net assets (stocks, bonds, real estate, cash, etc.) a nearly \$21 billion increase from the \$10,865,000,000 in net assets they held in 2000. Meanwhile according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, in that same period, union membership of the total U.S. workforce fell to an all time low of 11.3%, with a disgracefully small 6% of all private sector employees in U.S. belonging to unions. Furthermore, according to this report, 85% of current union revenue comes from dues collection, meaning that for the last two decade workers have literally funded a \$20 billion asset expansion of the establishment unions, with nothing but further retreat and retraction to show for it.



(Chart from *Jacobin* article:
<https://jacobin.com/2023/02/finance-unionism-union-density-decline-american-labor-movement-mass-organizing>)



(Chart from *Jacobin* article: <https://jacobin.com/2019/01/union-density-united-states-2018-bls>)

In reaction to this data, publications of the New “New Left” like the *Jacobin* have called for “aggressive spending” on tens of thousands of new union organizing staff to help develop a new wave of strikes and union expansion. This complete lack of awareness of the structural implications of expanding an already overgrown layer of union bureaucrats and petty bourgeois labor staffers is contradicted by their own admission, in an article on the possibilities of a “*Labor Party in the USA*”, that the establishment unions are tied at the hip with the bourgeois state to such an extent that the establishment unions will be hesitant to support even attempts at a reformist “labor party”:

“And while labor in the private sector has eroded to the point of near oblivion, labor’s relatively strong position in the public sector has been maintained to a significant extent, for better or worse, through political alliances with Democratic Party officeholders. The marriage may not be barren, but it has given us some rather disappointing children.

The New Deal order has been dead for decades, but US labor is, with very few exceptions, still committed to the party-union alliance it struck with the Democratic Party in the 1930s. Despite the diminished returns, it will continue to be very difficult for the socialist movement or anyone else to draw labor out of the Democratic coalition and into a new and untested political formation. The relative openness and flexibility of US political parties is what drew labor into the Democratic Party’s orbit in the first place. So long as unions can exert influence and protect their organizations through alliances with Democratic officeholders they will continue to do so.

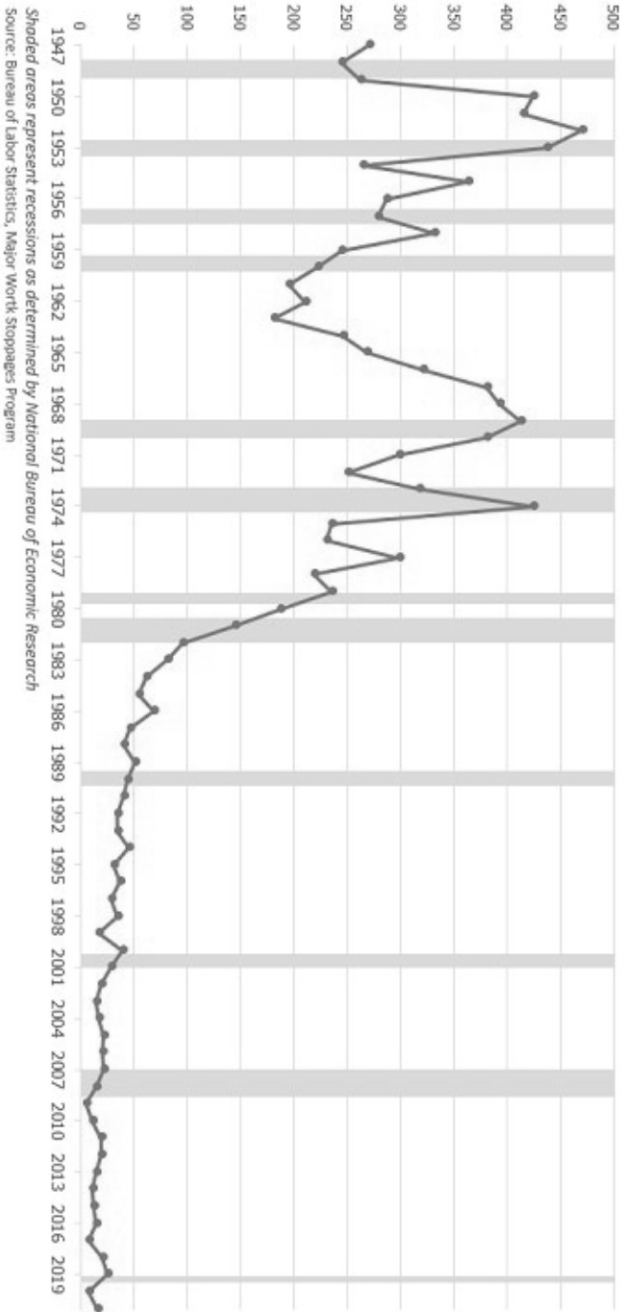
None of this to suggest that the formation of a mass independent labor or working-class party is an impossible task. But there are good reasons why the Republican Party is still, almost 170 years after its

founding, the only third party in American history to become a major party. If the new socialist movement does manage to get a viable new party off the ground, expect the unions to be among the last to get on board with it."

Though author Chris Maisano uses the term "[Democratic] party-union alliance" to describe the current objective situation facing labor, it is more apt to say that the establishment unions exist within a "state- union alliance". Specifically, the establishment unions have been incorporated into the bourgeois state as an appendage of its New Deal-era welfare apparatus, which is in large part why most unions find themselves so attached specifically to the Democratic rather than Republican party in the United States.

The NLRB-facilitated contract system and growing financial and legal entanglements of establishment labor provided the "carrot" by which the business unions felt obliged to incorporate themselves within the framework of the bourgeois democratic state. Following the strike wave of the 1970s, the federal government reined in the major unions even further through an expansive use of the Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act, which became the major "stick" of the state outside of Taft- Hartley. The finalization of the state control of the establishment unions can be seen rather dramatically in the precipitous drop off in large strikes starting in the 80s and proceeding until the present day, although that is also in part due to relocation of many major factories outside of the Northeast and "Rust Belt" areas.

Chart 3. Annual work stoppages involving 1,000 or more workers, 1947 - 2021



(Chart from:
<https://www.bls.gov/wsp/factsheets/summary-of-work->

[stoppages-in-the-united-states.htm](#))

In a systematic campaign against what the federal government entitled “labor racketeering”, the state used the mechanisms provided by RICO and the little known Red Scare-era Hobbs Act to literally take formal control of a variety of union locals around the country. For example, using federal RICO- charges the entire national IBT was put under formal government supervision from 1988 to 2018, with a government appointed committee of three court officers given the same amount of power as the office of IBT president for much of that period. While justified as a campaign against the influence of the mafia and “organized crime” within the establishment unions, the real reach and implications of RICO’s use being broadened to labor was much larger and consequential than most are willing to admit. Even up to the modern day, RICO charges are used by the state and capitalists to discipline establishment unions for even very basic militancy, such as in 2022 when the 3rd District Appeals Court allowed a corporation to sue the SEIU using the RICO Act after workers allegedly “vandalized” their workplace before a strike.

RICO laws and the Hobbs Act have made it so that almost any perceived or real use of force or threats against employers by NLRB-recognized unions can be turned into a charge of “labor racketeering”. In this way the establishment unions merger with the state apparatus is in essence a “deal with devil” that has robbed them of most of their effective tactics and strategies in exchange for legal recognition and institutionalization. Some on the “Left” mistakenly view this legal disciplining of the state unions, and the back-and-forth between them and other arms of the bourgeois state, as a sign of their persisting or potential revolutionary character. What this fails to take into account is that the American bourgeois democratic state apparatus, like all bourgeois states, is made up of various factions and interests which endlessly squabble among themselves while nevertheless maintaining the same fundamental class interests. It would

be like saying that local state governments have a fundamentally antagonistic relationship with the broader American bourgeoisie because of the seemingly endless fight between the “state rights” and “federal power” camp in U.S. domestic politics.

Three

THE U.S. LEFT'S RELATIONSHIP WITH STATE UNIONISM

Despite the great effort by many of the so-called “socialist Left” in the United States to defend the “revolutionary potential” and “key role” of the establishment unions, the character of the establishment unions as a major component in the current bourgeois monopoly capitalist system is something the people who actually lead and influence these unions are happy to admit. In a position paper that has come to define much of the establishment unions’ strategy and tactics since it was published in 2013, influential professional labor organizer Rich Yeselson speaks candidly from a perspective where the establishment unions are slaves to the wants and demands of the bourgeois state, and where somehow the interests of “labor” and the working class itself are now completely divorced from one another:

*“[...] Taft-Hartley isn’t going anywhere. Its land mines still detonate. And it still defines the legal and political context in which labor must operate as it tries to map out a strategy for the future. **An aggressive organizing strategy**, of the sort labor attempted when John Sweeney took the helm of the AFL-CIO, **just doesn’t work because the smart union strategists can’t compensate for a mostly (though not entirely) uninterested working class.** But labor can, without undertaking lengthy and expensive campaigns to organize new sectors, work to buttress the areas in which it is already strong, extend its alliances with other progressive groups, and even train the worker leaders of tomorrow. I call this “Fortress Unionism,” and **I believe it’s labor’s best play until the day arrives, if it ever does, when the workers themselves militantly signal that they want unions.**” (emphasis ours)*

Yeselson goes on to argue, as we have already explained, that the interventions by the bourgeoisie state into the labor movement from the 1930s – 1940s:

“... bureaucratized labor unions. Unions required more and more lawyers—and more and more union stewards adept at labor law—to untangle the welter of laws, board decisions, judicial decisions, and contractual obligations that now ensnared the modern labor organization. This pervasive legalistic framework made the labor titans increasingly cautious, and it drained the energy and creativity out of the members and their rank-and-file leadership—the idea was to wait for the lawyers to tell them what would fly before the NLRB or the courts.” This now dominant legalistic framework, in Yeselson’s eyes, means that establishment labor’s best strategy for the foreseeable future is to defend the current contracts and sectors they still have:

*“And then...wait. Wait for the workers to say they’ve had enough. **When they demand in vast numbers collective solutions to their problems, seize upon that energy and institutionalize it.***

*That is how massive union growth occurs—workers take matters into their own hands **and then unions capture that energy like lightning in a bottle.***

[...]

*As the San Francisco Chronicle editorialized in opposition to the 1946 Oakland general strike, sustained worker activism disrupts “the orderly process of daily life.” This may sound melodramatic, but there is no substitute for it. And when the workers do signal, the existing unions and their memberships should stand ready to help. **Unions were invented at the same time as modern capitalism. The system generates problems for employees that***

only collective representation (or the threat of it) can mitigate. An ostensibly democratic capitalism without unions is barely more thinkable than it would be without capitalists. The workers are willful when they want unions. Keep your eye on them. The unions will follow.
(emphasis ours)

There is a lot that can be analyzed and dissected in this position paper: how it openly embraces (like most contemporary “labor” leaders) unions as a class-collaborationist counterbalance which makes capitalism “ostensibly democratic”, how it claims modern establishment unions’ key purpose is to “institutionalize” the spontaneous demands of the workers for “collective solutions” within the framework of the bourgeois state, how even from the perspective of the professionalized organizing strata modern labor is basically dead in the water strategically. It is worth considering how we have gotten to the point where, with a very serious and sober tone, high-ranking labor organizers/strategists like Yeselson can take as one of their fundamental conditions that “the working-class” is “uninterested” in “labor”.

Can soldiers and generals be “mostly uninterested” in the military? Can doctors and nurses be “mostly uninterested” in medicine? Do carpenters need to be re-convinced of their interest in wood? It is a statement which makes no rational sense on its own, unless you accept the reality, already evident to the leaders of the contemporary labor movement, that modern establishment “labor” is divorced from and no longer synonymous with the “workers themselves”. That “labor” is now composed of legalistic institutions, state-sanctioned associations of employees, that are led by an alliance of petty-bourgeois professionals and working-class sell-outs tied at the hip with and regulated by the courts and state welfare apparatus.

Of course, the workers are still interested in their own

spontaneous struggles and labor politics abstractly. Even mainstream opinion polling shows that a majority of the US population has a positive view of the idea of labor unions. The question is whether the working masses are interested in the current state-sanctioned labor centers represented by the AFL-CIO, Change To Win, the IBT, and the other establishment unions.

The social democratic and left-Democratic press has done a thorough job analyzing and documenting the very real employer repression and anti-union propagandizing in the multiple recent failed attempts unionize Amazon centers in Bessemer, Alabama, upstate New York, and California, as well as the intentionally difficult and protracted NLRB union certification process. What the contemporary “socialist press” has failed to do on the other hand is interrogate the material conditions and internal contradictions, which as Marxists we understand are primary, behind the seemingly endless retreat of the labor movement from the working class that the failure of attempts to unionize Amazon encapsulates. The labor movement has always faced fierce repression, and suffered many bitter defeats, but now seems unable to even organize a single medium-sized or small-sized enterprise, much less a whole sector or major industrial conglomerate. Through a rightist misuse of the slogans “solidarity” and “unity”, seemingly basic questions afflicting modern labor work remain unanswered or under- analyzed.

If the unions are so weak, why do they have more resources at their disposal than they have ever had in their entire history? If the state is so hostile to contemporary unions, why do public sector unionization rates dwarf private sector membership rates and bourgeois politicians feel safe appointing current and former “labor leaders” to high-ranking government offices, committees, boards and positions? If the problem is simply who’s at the top, then why do waves of victories of ‘progressive’ candidates from “rank-and-file” caucuses in union elections seem to change nothing? If contemporary establishment unions are

fundamentally working-class organizations, why have they not experienced dramatically higher activity or renewed growth during recent peaks of working-class militancy like they did in the past, but instead increasingly rely on legislative processes, new regulations, and changes in bourgeois officialdom to meet their demands? And if the Labor Department constantly monitors and regulates the internal function of establishment unions, and has shown its willingness to formally seize control of the unions or retract collective bargaining rights when necessary, why do revolutionaries expect the bourgeois to allow them to peacefully take power and transform these same unions?

The more you begin to look beyond the mindless sloganeering of both the left and the right, the objective and scientific reality of the modern labor movement becomes undeniably clear. The establishment labor unions, or American state unions, are state-sanctioned collective bargaining units, nothing more, nothing less. They are punished when they step out of that role, and the modern collective bargaining system is designed to make state union officialdom a “partner” and ally of the bosses and capitalists when it comes to disciplining their employees and enforcing the terms of the contract. The state unions then become one of the primary enforcers of a thousand of policies, tiers, and categories created by the bourgeoisie to divide the workers, divisions the old industrial unionists once sought to destroy.

Given this reality, why then do so many self-proclaimed revolutionaries continue to advocate for confining our work within the AFL-CIO and other establishment unions? Why are they so loyal to institutions which so many everyday workers already view with either ambivalence, suspicion or disappointment?

One basic reason for this unprincipled and unproductive “united front” has to do with the class character of the contemporary American “left”, which is primarily composed of the lower and downwardly mobile petty-bourgeoisie rather

than the proletariat itself. These radicals of petty bourgeois origin and occupation can easily sympathize with and relate to the strata of similarly petty bourgeois professionals which run and control the establishment unions. Indeed many “would-be” radicals are, formerly were, or aspire to be professional “full-time” organizers, or are friends with and in the same social circles as these “labor” professionals.

A second, interconnected reason for this alliance is that the U.S. “left” has proven itself broadly unable to break with the bourgeois state in a variety of sectors, not just in the sphere of labor work. Many would-be American radicals are caught up as pawns in the struggle between different factions of the bourgeoisie, as represented by the Democratic and Republican party. The struggle of class against class, of proletariat against bourgeoisie, is put aside in favor of the struggle between the “socially progressive” and “social conservative” wings of U.S. imperialist capitalism. Placed perpetually on tailist footing, under the banner of “harm reduction” these “revolutionaries” primarily work to defend the few-remaining social reforms and organs of the ailing welfare apparatus of the New Deal and Civil- Rights era, the establishment unions among them.

A third, and perhaps more understandable reason, argues that because there are still millions of workers who are members of the state unions the best way to win political leadership over them is by winning leadership positions within the structure of these institutions, and leveraging our forces within the establishment unions to “make them more militant” and “push them left”. These comrades fail to understand that the Marxist position has always been that we do work and seek to lead the workers and masses wherever they are located, not that we seek to capture and reform every organization the workers are a part of. For example, while the Italian and the German Communist parties infiltrated and did work among the workers within the state unions created by their respective fascist governments, they never abandoned the principle of independent proletarian

initiative, organizational structures, and political lines when doing work within these institutions and never fooled themselves that the Fascist state would somehow allow the Communists to take over and peacefully transform structures the fascists themselves had regulated and controlled.

Four

TOWARDS A REVOLUTIONARY POSITION ON STATE UNIONS

As Marxists we understand that dialectically, over time, things can transform into their opposite. Everything is a unity of opposites, and what might have began as an organization where the proletarian aspect was dominant over the bourgeois aspect can, in the twists and turns of class struggle, become an organization where the bourgeois aspect is dominant over the proletarian aspect. While this process also leaves open the possibility of the opposite occurring, as proletarian revolutionaries we understand that such a process will be inherently violent, combining destruction and construction in the same way the New State supplants and replaces the Old State in the course of people's war.

Relevant to this point is the CPUSA's line on the pre-NLRB phenomena of "company unions", described in their TUEL pamphlet entitled simply "Company Unions". Authored through a collaboration of Robert William Dunn and previously mentioned TUEL leader William Z. Foster,¹ the pamphlet explains how, in order to increase production, fight the influence of both the independent red and non-red unions, and enforce labor peace during the First World War, many capitalist enterprises began forming their own "councils", "shop committees", "associations", and even "unions" as employer-sponsored rivals to the existing trade unions of the time. These organizations, created on the initiative of the capitalists themselves, were recognized as legitimate by the newly created "National War Labor Board" (sound familiar?!), developed by the state to manage the economy during wartime. The TUEL correctly identified the "company unions" as inherently class-collaborationist institutions, tools of the state and capitalist classes that had

¹ Edit: The original published version of this piece mistakenly identifies the pamphlet's author as William Dunne, another Communist labor militant of the time, rather than correctly as a collaboration between Robert William Dunn and William Z. Foster

to be broken with and combated. It's worth understanding though that between 1,000,000 and 1,500,000 workers were members of these organizations during the late 1910s and most of the 1920s, making them the second largest "labor" conglomeration outside of the AFL.

In an incredible conclusion section that foresees the rise of state unionism, the original and greatest American champion of the "boring from within" line himself, William Z. Foster, writes:

"An especially menacing feature of the company union movement is the pronounced tendency of the trade union bureaucracy to accept its principles and practices and to transform the trade unions into company unions. This tendency expresses itself through the so-called B. & O. Plan and the "new wage policy" adopted by the American Federation of Labor at its recent convention. Refusing to militantly fight against the employers, the trade union bureaucrats are surrendering to them, by entering into agreements with them to raise production and to abolish strikes. The adoption of the B. & O Plan was a long step in the direction of company unionism and class collaboration generally. Already sections of the employers and the trade union bureaucrats foresee a practical merging of the trade union and company union movement. In such a consolidation the demands of the reactionary bureaucracy would be comparatively simple. Neglecting the interests of the workers as usual, their principal demand would be for the maintenance of some sort of a dues-paying organization which would serve to pay their fat salaries and to finance their labor banks and other trade union capitalist schemes. In return for this concession, they would defend the interests of the employers even more militantly than

*now against the insistent demands of the masses in general and the left wing in particular. The occasional outcries of the bureaucrats against the company unions **cannot hide the fact that these same bureaucrats are tending strongly in the direction of accepting company unionism.*** (emphasis ours)

The B & O Plan (Baltimore and Ohio Cooperation Plan), was a “union-management cooperation plan” proposed by the B&O Railroad Company to “improve morale” and increase “incentives to efficiency” among their workers by formally recognizing and regularly meeting with their union in exchange for the union’s commitment to reduced militancy and perpetual “cooperation” with the company on all issues related to wages and working conditions (once again, sound familiar?!). The analysis presented in the pamphlet shows how TUEL activists, even while at the time still working within the AFL business unions, were able to see and address the increasingly likely possibility that the trade unions led by the labor aristocracy could turn into their opposite and fully embrace company unionism through the creation of collective agreements with the employers, mediated by the state apparatus, that contained no strike clauses and wedded the establishment unions and employers together in joint management of the workers.

While generations of would-be labor radicals have used the Trade Union Education League period as justification for the never ending struggle to wrest control of the establishment unions from their current leadership, the TUEL’s line on what to do with the company unions shows it’s not exactly clear any TUEL leader, even Foster, would endorse their approach given the character and structure of the major modern unions:

*“The fight against company unionism must be made a special point of business by the trade union movement. **To destroy the company unions is an essential***

part of the great task of organizing the unorganized millions in the industry. The slogan must be, “Destroy the Company Unions and form Trade Unions.” If necessary we must penetrate the company unions when they have a mass following and disintegrate them from within, utilizing the resultant movements among the workers for the inauguration of wage and organizing campaigns. The experience during the movement of the steel workers in 1918-19, as well as among other groups of workers, **shows clearly that the workers will not only demolish the company unions, but also use them as starting points for the formation of real trade unions.** But the fight against company unionism must be accompanied by a militant struggle in the unions against its first cousins, the B. & O. Plan and the various forms of **trade union capitalism**, such as labor banking, trade union life insurance, etc. The Trade Union Educational League, embracing the most conscious and progressive elements among the workers, **must carry on an unremitting campaign against the B. & O. Plan and every other manifestation of class collaboration.** It must play a leading part in the consolidation of the unorganized masses, in the development of a new leadership for the unions, in the mobilization of the working class for a policy of real struggle against the employers. **Company unionism, including its trade union phase, the B. & O. Plan, is a menacing barrier to the progress of the workers. The road to working class emancipation lies through its shattered fragments.”** (emphasis ours)

We can see from this pamphlet that while the Trade Union Education League was willing to do work within the reactionary business unions of the AFL, and attempt to transform them into “class struggle unions” from the inside out, even they were unwilling to accept openly class

collaborationist institutions like the National War Labor Board, the company unions, and anti-strike contracts like the B&O Plan as part of any real and authentic trade union movement. When the CPUSA did eventually work within the NLRB-sanctioned CIO union center during the late 1930s and 1940s, it's important to remember this occurred in the context of the CPUSA rightist Browderite interpretation of the Comintern's Popular Front line wherein the party openly sought a "united front against fascism" with the FDR administration and "progressive-wing" of the Democratic Party. With the opening of the Cold War following World War 2, it would be the very NLRB-mechanisms that the CIO opportunistically utilized so heavily that allowed for the bourgeois state to turn around and intervene in the labor movement to repress and purge revolutionary workers as never before.

With this historical background in mind, we can characterize U.S. state unionism as the state- sanctioned and state-promoted merger of the preceding trends of company unionism on the one hand, and the right-wing of the business union leadership, which advanced what the Trade Union Educational League called "trade union capitalism", on the other. Labor law, the New Deal, and the resulting bourgeois democratic welfare apparatus institutionalized class-collaborationist company unionism as the only acceptable form of "unionism" the establishment unions could take, and created the set of "labor institutions" which now dominate the U.S. labor movement even though they are alienated from the working-class itself. With the "left" of the labor movement destroyed and scattered during the Second Red Scare period, by the time the militants of the NCM attempted to "bring communism home to the workers" by taking over and transforming the establishment unions, they were dealing with an entirely different type of labor organization than the revolutionaries of the 1800s and the first half of the 1900s had.

This new state unionist "labor organization" was the main

organ of the national-level “union- management cooperation plan” implemented by the FDR administration and expanded under subsequent presidents, and was the basic organization of a state bureaucrat-labor aristocratic alliance, not a basic organization of the “workers themselves”. In 2023, the “practical merging of the trade union and company union movement” the Trade Union Educational League warned about and foresaw in 1926 has been long since achieved.

But if state unionism dominates the modern labor movement and establishment labor structures, what then is to be done?

The first corrective that recognizing the modern labor movement as dominated by state unionism obliges us to make is that the vast trash heap currently masquerading as “labor strategy” or “labor mass work” on the U.S. “revolutionary” left must be cast aside. Calls to “build a fighting labor movement”, push the major unions to be “more militant”, build links with “organized labor”, “support labor”, and “stand in solidarity” with the workers are meaningless without, as the Brazilian comrades describe, a decisive break with American state unionism. All revolutionaries in the labor movement must strive to construct “a class-based, combative and independent unionism” in the United States without exception.

By not rejecting state unionism, the slogans of the U.S. left become at worst blatant tailism of the “progressive”-wing of the bourgeois state apparatus, and at best a call to reconstitute the establishment unions as AFL-style business unions rather than modern state unions (AFL-style business unions which merged with the state apparatus and company unionist structures to get us into this mess in the first place). That second call is how we end up with “left-wing rank-and-file caucus” Teamsters for a Democratic Union (TDU) supporting Sean O’Brien for IBT president, despite the fact that O’Brien is a well-known reactionary “good old boy” with a mobbed-up Teamsters official father and had been temporarily suspended from the Teamsters less than a

decade prior for openly threatening TDU members who challenged a buddy of his. O'Brien and most of the candidates of the so-called "rank-and file caucuses" and "union reform" slates represent a "progressive" state unionism that emulates the bread-and-butter establishment unions of the 1950s and 1960s while Hoffa Jr, a lawyer who never worked a real job in his life, represented a continuation of a conservative state unionism even most Democrats found unpalatable. Where Lenin once criticized the call to "lend the economic struggle a political character" as rightist and fundamentally anti-revolutionary, the call of most of the current U.S. left has devolved into "revive the economic struggle" without even a passing mention of politics or the revolutionary political struggle.

By not breaking with state unionism, the "strike support" and "labor solidarity" work of the DSA, PSL, ISG and assorted American socialist alphabet soup becomes a united front between a predominately petty-bourgeois left and the professionalized organizing staff of the establishment unions, that is, a united front of the "progressive" petty-bourgeoisie with itself. It's worth noting how the DSA and other supposedly "left-wing" organizations describe their labor work. An article from *In These Times* describing the DSA's recent labor campaigns quotes a DSA-linked organizer as stating there "is a war on the working class in this country and the only way we are going to win is by building an army of organizers" and goes onto describe the DSA-initiated Emergency Workplace Organizing Committee as: "involved in 186 active campaigns and has assisted in union wins at Trader Joe's, a Manhattan theater and a hospital in Austin, Texas, among others." Here even a DSA-friendly article describes the dark reality we have explained above, where instead of educating the workers in class struggle and forging the advanced workers into the bones of an independent and class-conscious workers movement, we build an "army" of petty-bourgeois professional organizers and have them go among and organize the workers and attempt to expand the reach of the establishment state unions. And even they must

admit they have only had success organizing at “Trader Joe’s, a Manhattan theater and a hospital in Austin, Texas.” Hell, our organization has had some “success” organizing among workers at a handful of UPS hubs and public schools, but you don’t see us parading the most basic work building links and leading small sections of the masses as successes worthy of applause.

The PSL and other so-called “Leninist” groups are no better, with the PSL’s most recent article on the IBT-UPS TA debacle claiming: “A contract victory at UPS shows the power that workers have when they are organized in a fighting union. The task now is to spread this organization to the nonunion corporations in the shipping and logistics industry. Sean O’Brien and the rest of the Teamsters leadership have spoken on many occasions about the importance of organizing Amazon.” Here the supposedly “communist” PSL tails even the bland social democrats of the Amazon Labor Union by claiming that somehow the Teamsters’ leadership’s betrayal of their promise to strike to win major concessions from UPS means they are a “fighting union” (which backed down from fighting) and that revolutionaries should work to expand their influence and reach spread to non-Teamsters organized corporations in the logistics industry. The absolute dominance of state unionism in the United States means establishment unions can do the absolute minimum, i.e. threaten a strike, and be applauded as heralds of a new “fighting” labor movement worth harassing an otherwise disinterested working class into supporting.

The second corrective is that revolutionaries in the U.S. must soberly reckon with the reality that the path to revolution in our country lies through either splitting or outright destroying most, if not all, of the establishment state unions, and constructing a new powerful, combative, independent and class- conscious alternative union center in their place. It is a reality that, even if we stick our heads in the sand and refuse to recognize, will be forced upon us in the course of any serious revolutionary struggle in the United States. If we

were to pursue the route of most mainstream “Left” organizations and confine our labor work to expanding and attempting become the leadership of and transform the state unions, and then act as socialists with even the most minor fidelity, the bourgeois state would inevitably seize control of and attempt to purge us from the state unions we legitimately threaten to take over, thus forcing an organizational split upon us on their terms. Such a split was forced upon the ILWU, UE and other Communist-controlled CIO locals during the Second Red Scare and it will certainly happen again if revolutionary workers ever pose a serious threat to the American capitalist order.

This recognition of the state unionist reality of the modern labor movement should not be confused with a call to completely abandon the state unions, as Lenin criticized in *“Left Wing” Communism: An Infantile Disorder*. U.S. revolutionaries must continue to agitate, penetrate, and organize within the employer and state-sanctioned collective bargaining units (i.e. state unions) as the CPUSA did within the company unions and the Communists of the 1930s and 40s did within the fascist state unions. In doing this revolutionary workers and labor activists can avoid isolation from the sections of the working-class and lower-petty bourgeoisie organized within the state unions, and utilize these state- sanctioned bargaining units to intervene in and lead the struggle for revindications and reforms. The role of revolutionaries within the state-controlled bargaining units must be to expose and undermine the state unionist center, the harmful role of state interventions and the NLRB-system, and agitate among the workers for an independent class-conscious unionist current. The role of revolutionaries within the state unions is not to do as almost every “left-wing” group has done following the recent last-minute UPS-IBT Tentative Agreement and proclaim “solidarity” and “unity” with every betrayal of the workers by the state unionist structures and bully/pressure the workers into accepting every wretched compromise and concession.

This is also not to be confused with a call to dogmatically view all currently existing unions as equals. For example, even during the TUUL Red Union period the CPUSA continued to pursue a “boring from within” strategy within the American Federation of Teachers due to the widespread militancy and relatively advanced political consciousness of the members of that particular business union. The vast majority of the major establishment unions (AFSCME, IBT, UAW, NEA, SEIU, etc.) are, however, part of the state unionist current within the labor movement and must be dealt with and understood as such.

As the TUEL wrote regarding company unionism, “the road to working class emancipation lies through [the] shattered fragments” of state unionism. This is inevitable because one of the key tasks of proletarian revolutionaries within the labor movement is to develop the class consciousness and organic organization of the masses by carrying “on an unrelenting campaign against” all “manifestations of class collaboration” in the process of revolutionary class struggle. The term “organic” is important here because a basic characteristic of any true unionist current is that its bodies and organisms derive their legitimacy and support from the workers themselves, not from the state, employer, or any other body alien to the masses. The revolutionary tactic of developing cadre and “professional revolutionaries” cannot be distorted into a call for petty bourgeois professionals, lawyers, and other varied “union staffers” to dominate and control the spontaneous workers’ movement.

The third corrective is that revolutionary workers must begin developing and implementing our decisive break with state unionism now, not at some prophesied ideal point in the future. Because they are currently largely foreign to the workers and base themselves in the machinery of a weak and feeble American welfare apparatus, the state unions already are essentially irrelevant as a real and powerful organizing force outside of the public sector and a few isolated “union cities” and unionized industries and enterprises. In the

mostly unorganized sectors and enterprises, where the large majority of America's working masses are located, we must begin preparing the basis for the independent class-conscious unionist current that is necessary if we ever wish to achieve revolution in the United States. As part of this long-term goal we must begin to seriously grapple with the task of collectively organizing workplaces and leading workers without the state unions and with only the most minimal necessary contact with the state labor regulatory apparatus. It is in the unorganized sectors that we must start to explore in earnest with all available energy the possibilities and potential for red unions and independent unions.

In the service, restaurant, agricultural, light industry, and many other sectors the state unions meant to represent the workers within those industries are quite literally almost non-existent. For example, according to a recent bourgeois press report the United Farm Workers' "membership is so low that UC Merced researchers say farmworker union membership is now statistically zero. Today the UFW focuses its efforts on political advocacy, hoping for better election outcomes by making accommodations such as at-home voting." In the unorganized sectors, many state unions have essentially given up the pretense of being traditional trade or industrial unions, and have explicitly made the jump entirely from trade union to NGO. Why revolutionaries would tie themselves to institutions which are not only thoroughly corrupt and reactionary, but also have "statistically zero" active support among the workers they supposedly "organize and represent" defies all logic.

Revolutionary organizations that work within these sectors should focus on consolidating the advanced and bringing up the intermediate masses within independent union or proto-union structures that allow not only for political and ideological autonomy, but are also made up of and based within the workers themselves rather than university campuses and the American domestic NGO-complex.

The originally independent Amazon Labor Union and Starbucks Workers United campaigns, which state unionism increasingly subsumes and ties to its failing machinery, are examples of the potential independent unionism has even now, when many so-called “leftists” continue to tail the workers and demand they enter into weak and compromised state unions rather than organize independent worker- led unions the masses are more willing to trust. It is within Amazon, Starbucks, or other enterprises organized under similar “independent” unions that the famed “boring from within” strategy becomes more legitimate or possible, as these supposedly “novel and new” independent unions are much more equivalent to the historical business unions of the pre-state unionism era than the current establishment labor centers. Such a tactic is however still complicated by the fact that state unionism is so prevalent, and has such a strong hold on the labor movement, that even these independent unions can quickly morph into their opposite. This can be seen most readily by the rapid stagnation of the ALU and recent formation of the ALU Democratic Reform Caucus, which (correctly) alleges ALU is so already dysfunctional it needs new leadership and a thorough reformation of its current structure and method.

In the sectors and enterprises already organized by the state unions, our primary task is to undermine state unionism and encourage independent worker initiative by constructing a political organizational apparatus and system of support separate from and opposed to the professionalized petty bourgeois state union centers within the state-sanctioned bargaining units. Given the inevitable split and expulsion that will be forced upon us by the bourgeois state if we are to have even moderate success regionally or nationally, we must never liquidate our forces within the state union apparatus itself. Instead revolutionary workers should utilize shop papers, clandestine activist networks, and independent shop floor or building-level organizing committees to mobilize the workers within the state-sanctioned bargaining units to struggle for their daily demands and agitate among them to

raise their political consciousness and educate them in the theory and practice of class struggle. These independent red labor organizations should form the basis of the red fractions within the state unions that will eventually split and as Dunn and Foster wrote of the company unions, use the old establishment state unions “as starting points for the formation of real trade unions.”

Conclusion

THE LABOR MOVEMENT WORKERS DEMAND

This is the work organizations such as New Day at UPS and the Southern New England Labor Council want to accomplish. We call on all those who unite with our analysis to reach out, carry out a decisive break with state unionism, and join us in forming a new independent, combative and class conscious unionist current within the contemporary labor movement. Furthermore, we call on all those who disagree with our analysis to demonstrate how the establishment American unions remain independent of the bourgeois democratic state, are not state-sanctioned class collaborationist institutions, and are mainly products of the spontaneous movement of the workers themselves. The workers demand an end to their exploitation, and our task is not to lead them back into the arms of the bourgeois democratic state, but instead lead them on the path to proletarian revolution, on the path in which they will take their destiny in their own hands and lead humanity into a classless society without exploitation or oppression. It is for this historic task we work, not for the further enrichment of a handful of privileged labor lawyers and professional “labor leaders” who will use the hard-work and revolutionary energy of the masses to further their own careers and win themselves seats in the halls of power.

Even though it might seem daunting, the reality is that separating ourselves from the stagnant and dysfunctional organizing center that is state unionism is a profoundly liberating goal. In building the bones of a real independent, combative unionism based among the workers themselves, we free ourselves from the essentially impossible task of transforming the establishment unions. A task which would entail somehow radicalizing the already existing “reform caucuses”, then winning in internal union elections that are stacked against “subversive” candidates, then purging and deconstructing the mass of corrupt union officers and union professional staffers without provoking a split (which is

complicated by the fact most union staffers are themselves protected by and organized within their own state unions), and then finally somehow unshackling these newly-revolutionized establishment unions from the restrictions of modern labor law without provoking a federal backlash and takeover.

Instead of playing bourgeois politics, we must devote our time to organizing and building up the organic capacity and leadership of the workers themselves. We must finally be able to combine legal and illegal methods in ways all successful historical workers movements have, and harness the spontaneous energy of the masses towards developing and expanding the class struggle rather than funneling it back into the endless hamster wheel of class collaboration. In breaking with the state and class collaboration, we put the essential tool of the labor union back in everyday workers' hands, and help reconstitute the deep, powerful and independent mass movement that is the fertile ground of any revolution. Furthermore, in breaking with the professionalized NGO-like state union organizing centers, on a practical level we give ourselves many more possibilities tactically and strategically, as the spontaneous and grassroots activities of workers themselves are much less regulated, and exist more in a kind of legal "gray-zone", in comparison to the highly-monitored activities of the large state unions.

Of course a thorough break with state unionism also brings with it a new Pandora's Box of practical and theoretical questions regarding what should be our goals, forms, methods, tactics, and strategies in the current period. How should revolutionaries participate in and lead the spontaneous workers movement in such a way that they avoid either the error of class-collaboration and corporatism/social fascism on the one hand and the error of sectarianism and effective isolation from the masses on the other? Is the NLRB-contract system a poison pill, as some revolutionaries claim, or can the existing contracts be

modified and still used in ways that win the economic and political demands of the workers without tying them closer to the bourgeois state? What does a “red” or “independent” union look like and how would it even function in the modern day on a large, industrial-wide, scale? What is the appropriate level of clandestine revolutionary workers should have in the state unions and in ultra-repressive enterprises like Amazon? The possible questions go on into infinity, because the uncomfortable truth is that we will only begin to be able to answer these questions through bitter and sustained struggle, through summation, investigation, and social practice.

As revolutionaries, as Marxists, as workers, we have a duty to learn from the heroes and struggles of the past. But recognizing, learning from, and paying respect to the labor struggles of the past does not mean dogmatically following their strategy and tactics despite the fact we now live in a much changed and alien world. Humility does not mean blind deference. Rather, in our context, humility means recognizing the reality that we are much weaker and less-developed than our revolutionary predecessors, and reckoning with the fact that if those much greater than ourselves have failed to “transform” the establishment unions for nearly four generations in a row, we are hardly in a place to mindlessly copy and paste their strategies, but successfully this time. We ask all those who are skeptical of our positions and analysis to move beyond knee-jerk reactions and to truly explore for themselves whether their own work, their own strategies for “socialist” labor organizing, are leading us on a path to working-class revolution, to communism. All those who read this document should look into the history of the unions meant to represent them, whether they are a member or not, into the history of labor struggles in this country, into the concrete conditions of our economy and their workplace, and find for themselves if there is anything worthwhile in what we write.

It is a simple truth that state unionism will never bite the

hand that feeds it. We all understand that the more than half-century long stagnation and decline of the labor movement must come to an end if a revolution is to ever succeed in our country. Much more difficult to recognize is that the only actual way to do this, the only feasible way to truly revive a class-conscious, independent, and combative trade unionism in the United States, necessarily involves revolutionary workers breaking with the trend largely responsible for labor's decline in the first place: state unionism.

State unionism is a dead end for all involved except the capitalists and those at the top. Even if tomorrow supposedly "labor-friendly" capitalist politicians like Joe Biden used executive orders and other means to make it legally easier for the state unions to expand, not only could any so-called "gains" be easily reversed by the next administration or even Biden himself, but such expansion would lead the workers back into the swamp of state-sponsored "labor-management partnership" rather than out of it. Strengthening the dying state unionist centers reverses rather than builds on spontaneous working-class militancy and rebellion, and thus becomes a completely self-destructing goal for any would be "revolutionary" or rank-and-file working-class activist in the labor movement.

Instead, let us once-and-for-all cast aside vile collaborationist phrases like "responsible corporations", "fair capitalism" and "labor-friendly administrations (political, corporate or otherwise)". Let the workers fight for themselves in the more than two-hundred year-old class-war that has already been declared against us, and let us make the slogan of the renewed revolutionary working-class labor movement once again be "class against class."

**FOR A COMBATIVE, CLASS-CONSCIOUS, AND
INDEPENDENT U.S. LABOR MOVEMENT!**

Southern New England Labor Council

Part Four

POLITICAL ECONOMY OF THE AMERICAN LABOR MOVEMENT

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New Labor Press

“Let others work for the destruction of the unions. The bourgeoisie is destroying them; the reformist tactics destroy and weaken the trade union organizations of the working class. It is not for the communists to participate in any such endeavor.”

– Lozovsky, The Tasks of the Communists in the Trade Unions

COMMENTARY

This document is a compliment to “State Unionism in the US” and “Revisionism and Organized Labor in the US”. If “State Unionism” is primarily an ideological document, then this is its counterpart examining how concretely state unionism exists as the dominant practice in the American labor movement. The state unions in the US act like corporations in their own right, and therefore must be analyzed in the same way. Unlike corporations, however, the “product” they sell is a docile working class.

Important to note is the combination of exorbitant salaries at every level and fixed assets (numbering in the hundreds of millions of dollars in multiple unions) tied to the union itself. This ensures loyalty to American imperialism on both an individual and systemic level. Another feature of the state unions that is rarely studied, and even promoted as a positive feature in the liberal press, is the widespread development of reformist factions. These factions may be specific to one union, one industry, or even a single bargaining unit, but they are universally reactionary. They profit off the masses’ justified resentment of the state unions and channel it back into the system. Rarely, however, are these factions able to actually ride mass support into power. The most successful of these factions are the Teamsters for a Democratic Union (a faction in the International Brotherhood of Teamsters) and the Unite All Workers for Democracy (a United Auto Workers faction), yet all they really accomplished was organizing support for existing bureaucrats whose coattails they rode into minor subservient positions within the vast “professional organizer” layer bought and paid for with the obligatory dues money garnished from the wages of millions of “organized” workers.

Introduction

All of the major capitalist press organs unanimously hailed 2023 as the year of the trade union. Major headlines in the capitalist press include: “Unions Are Winning Big for the First Time in Decades” from Bloomberg;¹ “Major strikes in 2023 sets 20-year record, Labor Department says” from the Washington Post;² “The Big Wins by Unions in 2023” and “For Labor Unions, 2023 Was the Year of the Strike— and Big Victories” from the Wall Street Journal;³⁻⁴ “How 'strike culture' took hold in the US in 2023” from the BBC;⁵ “Unions made 2023 the year of the strike. What will happen next?” from ABC News;⁶ “Labor movements are seeing historic victories this year. Can unions keep up the momentum?” from PBSa;⁷ “US sees union boom despite big companies’ aggressive opposition” from the Guardian;⁸ “Big wins and legal battles: How unions old and new did in 2023” from NPR. Both⁹ American establishment media and the private monopoly capitalists are very enthusiastic about how the American labor movement has been proceeding. The US Department of the Treasury even claimed that, “Promisingly, there have been recent signs of a reinvigorated labor movement,” which it hailed as a positive development on the grounds that, “Unions can boost businesses’ productivity by improving working environments and by giving experienced workers more of an input into decisions that design better and more cost-effective workplace procedures.”¹⁰ Kamala Harris’ White House Task Force on Worker Organizing and Empowerment is marshaling numerous government agencies to that end. (The full composition of this Task Force is a virtual catalog of hardcore reactionaries.)¹¹ Thus, the consensus among the American bourgeoisie is clear: 2023 was the year of big wins for American workers, and these wins were the result of the state union contracts.

The petty-bourgeois press, including the reformist and revisionist organs as well as the radical liberal publications, unanimously agreed with the bourgeois analysts. People’s World, the organ of the revisionist CPUSA, said, “There is no

question that 2023 was a year of record-setting victories for U.S. workers and their unions.”¹² Liberation News, the newspaper of the Party for Socialism and Liberation, said of UPS, “UPS capitulated to all major Teamster demands. A tentative agreement was reached pending membership ratification. *By all accounts, this is a major victory* — not just for 340,000 Teamsters, but *for the entire working class*.”¹³ PSL prints such headlines as “Historic labor victories in New Mexico: Graduate worker unions ratify their first contracts,”¹⁴ “Federal government report reveals extent of historic surge in labor organizing,”¹⁵ and “Walmart workers lead historic labor struggle.”¹⁶ Freedom Road Socialist Organization, not to be outdone by the PSL splitters, claimed, “The United Auto Workers made American labor history Friday, April 19, with its biggest organizing win in decades, when workers at the Volkswagen Chattanooga plant in Tennessee voted decisively to unionize.”¹⁷ And even more inexplicably, FRSO claimed about the UPS negotiations that, “The economic package presented Wednesday, June 21, by the Teamster National Negotiating Committee is the largest financial proposal ever made by a labor union.”¹⁸ Why FRSO claims that it is the largest financial proposal ever when not even the UPS Teamsters know what it was—who knows. Labor Notes, of course, is the house organ of the state union bureaucracy. Their headlines include “‘Big Bargaining’ in Oakland Led to Big Gains,”¹⁹ “Despite Big Teamster Wins at UPS, Some Expectations Outpace Gains,”²⁰ “Striking Writers and Actors Hold the Line Against Tech Slicing and Dicing.”²¹ (A ridiculous article that also claims “Their concerns are remarkably similar to those of the 340,000 Teamsters who work at United Parcel Service, where the union achieved an historic wage and working conditions victory just days before an August 1 strike deadline.”) Labor Notes is able to find victories everywhere they look: “Victory Against Polluter Points Way to Clean, Green, and Fully Funded Schools”;²² “Big 3 Buckled as Stand-Up Strike Spread”;²³ “Starbucks Workers Win Breakthrough Promise of Real Negotiations”;²⁴ “Amazon Workers on Staten Island Clinch a Historic Victory.”²⁵

Socialist Alternative (SAlt) claimed, “Grad Student Unions Are Setting A New Pace In Higher Ed”²⁶ and “Workers Strike Back: On The Ground Of A Historic Moment For LA Schools,”²⁷ and copied the bourgeois liberal analysis of the UPS contract: “It was rank-and-file Teamsters – drivers, inside workers, and part-timers all working to prepare for the strongest possible strike – who created the pressure from outside of the bargaining table to improve the TA.”²⁸ SAlt also incorrectly characterized the UAW’s phony strike as a win, under the headline “How Can Unions Turn The Tide For Working People?”: “Some of these strikes, like most prominently the one conducted by the United Auto Workers (UAW), won significant wage increases and better working conditions.”²⁹ Jacobin essentially reprinted all the false claims of the labor-management studies professors: “Seven Lessons from Starbucks Workers’ Historic Victory”;³⁰ “In the Teamsters and UAW, Historic Victories Were Due to Decades of Union Reform Efforts”;³¹ “Union Gives a Close Look at the Historic Amazon Labor Union Win”;³² “The UAW Now Has Tentative Deals With All Three Automakers – and They Look to Be Historic.”³³ Jeff Schuhrke, a teacher at the Harry Van Arsdale Jr. School of Labor Studies, SUNY Empire State University in New York City, wrote such propaganda pieces for the state unions as “Here’s What UAW Workers Won in a ‘Historic’ TA After Striking at Ford”³⁴ and “Cross-Union Solidarity Is Fueling the Historic Summer Strike Wave”³⁵ for *In These Times*. (The same professor wrote the extremely short-sighted article “U.S. Rail Workers Are Poised to Begin a National Strike Next Week” in 2022, also published by *In These Times*.)³⁶ Cosmonaut, the “theoretical” organ of the state bureaucracy and their radical liberal lackeys, said in their backhanded defense of IBT President O’Brien that there is “a historic moment in the US labor movement”³⁷ and elsewhere claimed that “our comrades in DSA labor circles [referring to the state unions] are doing outstanding work.”³⁸ and that “within the unionized section of the class, the militant or progressive reform wing is on the rise.”³⁹ Even the revisionist Maoist Communist Union described “the uptick in labor union

struggles” (presumably referring to the state unions, based on their other documents) as one of “some very promising and exciting developments in popular movements in the United States.”⁴⁰ All of these organs supposedly represent different ideologies, from the Trotskyist Socialist Alternative, to the eclectic *Cosmonaut*, to the “Maoist” MCU, to the labor-liberal *In These Times*. Yet they are all in total agreement on the state of the American labor movement, which in their opinion is better than ever.

The vision of the labor movement presented by these headlines is a total falsehood, top to bottom. Trade union density in the US hit a historic low in 2023, with only 10% of all workers belonging to trade unions, down from 11.9% in 2010.⁴¹ Strike activity was basically nonexistent if measured by lost work days as a proportion of total work days. The percent of total working time lost to work stoppages was 0.04% in 2023, compared to 0.06% in 2000, 0.29% in 1970, and 0.38% in 1949.⁴² The highest profile “strikes” actually weren’t even strikes at all, with UPS having zero work stoppages and the Big 3 auto manufacturers essentially carrying out a lockout via the UAW. (Meaning that instead of the workers deciding to not work until their demands were met, they were banned from working until they accepted a company-dictated labor agreement.). Under extremely favorable labor market conditions, union incomes actually increased less than non-union incomes by multiple percentage points.⁴³ Not only did the state unions fail to fight for demands beyond the market standard, they failed to even reach the level of the market standard! Workers would have benefited more from the post-COVID market demand than they did from the “historic wins” of the state unions. Year after year, the state unions function as a ratchet, forcing the workers to “tighten their belts” when the capitalists demand more, yet mysteriously failing to increase their standards even in the most optimal conditions.

Actually, reality might even be bleaker than the data suggests. It’s highly likely the number of workers recorded as

trade union members is inflated. For example, the International Brotherhood of Teamsters does not differentiate between retirees and working members, so it may actually be losing active members. (As opposed to Radish Research's claim of a mild uptick.)⁴⁴ Mike Antonucci wrote three enlightening columns on the main teachers unions' efforts to conceal their real membership numbers and calling into question their membership and revenue numbers, which simply "don't add up".⁴⁵⁻⁴⁶⁻⁴⁷ Radish Research pointed out that, "the AFL-CIO claims it has thirteen million members, but four million of those "members" are from Working America. The AFL-CIO set up Working America in 2003 to contact non-union workers in political campaigns (this was before the Supreme Court's Citizens United decision, which allowed unfettered spending by unions and others). 'Members' of Working America do not have collective-bargaining contracts, voting rights, or mandatory dues. You can basically join by clicking on a link. Some other unions also have similar membership-lite categories."⁴⁸ The state unions are notorious for their extreme fraudulence in all their dealings with workers, and as they have a vested interest in making themselves appear larger and more influential than they actually are, the figures cited here should be considered charitable.

The American trade unions have never been less democratic, more integrated with the state, and more openly allied with the policies of the bourgeois parties. Yet the so-called "left" in the US continues to hold up these completely rotten institutions as the main tool for defending the immediate interests of the workers. Therefore, a thorough political-economic analysis of the labor movement in the United States is in order. As Mao Zedong said in *Critique of Soviet Economics*, "Human knowledge always encounters appearances first. Proceeding from there, one searches out principles and laws." Analyzing the trade-union movement as it appears in the US at the present time confirms the fundamental laws of social development as described by Marxism-Leninism-Maoism, and ultimately confirms the

basic Marxist thesis that, “The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles (*The Communist Manifesto*).” The American labor movement is no exception to this. The American trade unions are thoroughly bourgeois institutions, and this is clearly visible in every facet of their existence. Failure to elaborate a class line in the labor movement, failure to carry it out, and the failure of the supposedly advanced elements of the class to correctly lead the trade union struggle has brought the American labor movement to new lows.

End Notes:

TOTAL LEVEL OF LABOR ORGANIZATION AND COMPOSITION

In order to understand the American labor movement, it is necessary to understand just how limited in scope labor organization actually is in the US and who it is mainly directed at.

As said above, the proportion of organized labor compared to the total workforce is the lowest on record. The Economic Policy Institute claimed that private sector unionization in 2023 saw a slight uptick to 6.9% (defined as private sector employees covered by a collective bargaining agreement) compared to a 36% unionization rate for public sector employees.⁴⁹ Broken down by demographics, the EPI claimed that, “Of all major racial and ethnic groups, Black workers continued to have the highest unionization rates in 2023 at 13.1%. [...] The 13.1% unionization rate for Black workers in 2023 compares with 11.1% for white workers, 10.0% for Hispanic workers, and 9.0% for Asian workers.

Further, the entire increase in the level of unionization in 2023 occurred among workers of color.” The EPI also claimed that, “The gender gap in unionization is small, but it widened slightly in 2023, as the unionization rate for men held steady at 11.6%, while the rate for women declined from 11.0% to 10.7%.”

The EPI figures contradict the Bureau of Labor Statistics somewhat, as the BLS claims that, “The union membership rate of public-sector workers (32.5 percent) continued to be more than five times higher than the rate of private-sector workers (6.0 percent). [...] Men continued to have a higher union membership rate (10.5 percent) than women (9.5 percent). Black workers remained more likely to be union members than White, Asian, or Hispanic workers.”⁵⁰ Nevertheless, it is clear that unionization rates are historically low, men are more likely to be under a collective

bargaining agreement than women, Black workers are more organized (in the limited state union sense) than any other racial demographic, and the public sector is proportionally more organized than the private sector.

However, the private sector is much larger than the public sector, and absolutely there are slightly more unionized employees in the private sector. The BLS figures say, “In 2023, 7.0 million employees in the public sector belonged to unions, compared with 7.4 million workers in the private sector.” There were 16.2 million wage and salary employees represented by a union, including 6.6 million women versus 7.8 million men. These employees are not at all evenly distributed around the country either. According to the BLS, “Eleven states had union membership rates below 5.0 percent in 2023. South Carolina had the lowest rate (2.3 percent). The next lowest rates were in North Carolina and South Dakota (2.7 percent and 3.6 percent, respectively). Two states had union membership rates over 20.0 percent in 2023: Hawaii (24.1 percent) and New York (20.6 percent). In 2023, about 29 percent of the 14.4 million union members lived in just two states (California at 2.5 million and New York at 1.7 million). However, these two states accounted for 17 percent of wage and salary employment nationally.”⁵¹ There are also pretty major divergences according to age and terms of employment: “By age, workers ages 45 to 54 had the highest union membership rate in 2023, at 12.6 percent. Younger workers—those ages 16 to 24—had the lowest union membership rate, at 4.4 percent. In 2023, the union membership rate for full-time workers (10.9 percent) was more than double that for part-time workers (5.2 percent).” The BLS draws a distinction between “membership” and “representation” within a labor organization, and their figures diverge from those of the think tanks and bourgeois analysts, but not significantly, and there is unanimity among them regarding the basic trends regardless.

In terms of absolute levels of organization, this is the breakdown by industry taken from the Bureau of Labor

statistics:

This is the breakdown by occupation, which is important for differentiating between the proletarians and rest of the organized wage workers, taken from the Bureau of Labor Statistics:

Table 3. Union affiliation of employed wage and salary workers by occupation and industry, 2022-2023 annual averages
(Numbers in thousands)

Occupation and industry	2022				2023			
	Total employed	Members of unions ¹		Represented by unions ²	Total employed	Members of unions ¹		Represented by unions ²
		Total	Percent of employed			Total	Percent of employed	
OCCUPATION								
Management, professional, and related occupations.....	59,979	6,268	10.5	7,202	12.0	6,440	10.3	7,355
Management, business, and financial operations occupations.....	24,013	933	3.9	1,166	4.9	1,034	4.1	1,247
Management occupations.....	15,693	603	3.8	747	4.8	680	4.1	816
Business and financial operations occupations.....	8,319	329	4.0	421	5.1	353	4.0	431
Professional and related occupations.....	35,966	5,335	14.8	6,034	16.8	5,406	14.6	6,109
Computer and mathematical occupations.....	5,948	195	3.3	248	4.2	242	3.8	299
Architecture and engineering occupations.....	3,335	200	6.0	231	6.9	208	5.9	256
Life, physical, and social science occupations.....	1,679	152	9.1	180	10.7	188	10.6	212
Community and social service occupations.....	2,749	436	15.9	495	18.0	391	14.2	440
Legal occupations.....	1,547	80	5.1	102	6.6	81	5.1	105
Education, training, and library occupations.....	8,976	3,027	33.7	3,347	37.3	3,005	32.7	3,355
Arts, design, entertainment, sports, and media occupations.....	2,352	187	8.0	215	9.2	192	8.3	208
Healthcare practitioners and technical occupations.....	9,381	1,058	11.3	1,216	13.0	1,100	11.6	1,234
Service occupations.....	22,968	2,293	10.0	2,502	10.9	2,162	9.2	2,410
Healthcare support occupations.....	4,777	395	8.3	442	9.3	389	7.6	429
Protective service occupations.....	3,071	1,082	34.6	1,126	36.7	985	31.9	1,057
Food preparation and serving related occupations.....	7,749	279	3.6	316	4.1	259	3.2	286
Building and grounds cleaning and maintenance occupations.....	4,595	438	9.5	484	10.5	420	9.1	488
Personal care and service occupations.....	2,776	118	4.3	133	4.8	128	4.3	149
Sales and office occupations.....	27,804	1,674	6.0	1,924	6.9	1,727	6.2	1,971
Sales and related occupations.....	12,183	361	3.0	434	3.6	358	2.9	440
Office and administrative support occupations.....	15,621	1,313	8.4	1,490	9.5	1,370	8.8	1,532
Natural resources, construction, and maintenance occupations.....	12,180	1,736	14.3	1,864	15.3	1,741	14.4	1,866
Farming, fishing, and forestry occupations.....	910	39	4.3	43	4.7	40	4.5	42
Construction and extraction occupations.....	6,831	1,120	16.4	1,190	17.4	1,124	16.3	1,196
Installation, maintenance, and repair occupations.....	4,439	577	13.0	631	14.2	577	13.3	628
Production, transportation, and material moving occupations.....	18,742	2,315	12.4	2,510	13.4	2,353	12.6	2,550
Production occupations.....	7,898	903	11.4	966	12.2	916	11.6	1,005
Transportation and material moving occupations.....	10,844	1,412	13.0	1,544	14.2	1,438	13.3	1,555

And this is the breakdown of labor organizations by proportion of organized workers—note that the AFL-CIO is not counted as a single union, but rather split into its affiliates:

Union Membership "Market Share": 2023

Display Name	2023 Mbrs.	2023 Market Share
National Education Association	2,534,757	15.7%
SEIU	1,815,485	11.2%
Teamsters (IBT)	1,267,407	7.8%
Teachers (AFT)	1,244,866	7.7%
UFCW	1,182,472	7.3%
AFSCME	1,058,236	6.5%
Electrical Workers (IBEW)	699,886	4.3%
Steelworkers (USW)	539,661	3.3%
Laborers (LIUNA)	501,719	3.1%
Operating Engineers (IUOE)	405,517	2.5%
Machinists (IAM)	395,530	2.4%
Carpenters (UZBC)	390,103	2.4%
Auto Workers (UAW)	370,239	2.3%
Plumbers (UA)	366,230	2.3%
Communication Workers (CWA)	361,712	2.2%
Fire Fighters (IAFF)	309,822	1.9%
AFGE	298,101	1.8%
UNITE HERE	264,168	1.6%
SAG-AFTRA	261,395	1.6%
Letter Carriers (NALC)	196,740	1.2%

* does not include retirees; red indicates some Canadian membership
Table: @Radish_Research • Source: DOL OLMS • Created with Datawrapper

Thus, it has been shown that the absolute level of organization (the number of workers nominally organized within unions) remains extremely low, with isolated pockets of comparatively high unionization which mainly correspond to areas with highly developed Democratic Party political machinery. The above tables reveal a lot about the actual

class composition of the American labor movement, which tilts extremely hard towards the petty-bourgeoisie and other professionals, with education and health services in particular taking up a huge chunk of union membership. The BLS pointed out that, “The highest unionization rates were among workers in education, training, and library occupations (32.7 percent) and protective service occupations (31.9 percent).”^{52[4]} This is important because “protective service occupations” includes law enforcement officers, who are notorious for their complete freedom of action on the job and exorbitant pay rates. This is a perfect example of how the state unions actually operate in reverse: instead of organizing the worst paid, worst treated proletarians to fight for their interests, they sell themselves to the best paid, best treated (they literally get away with murder...) bourgeois agents for the easy income. They similarly remain concentrated within the public sector rather than the private capitalist enterprises themselves given that the bourgeois state remains their greatest benefactor.

The promoters of the state unions have only one statistic they can rely on, and it's the BLS claim that, “Nonunion workers had median weekly earnings that were 86 percent of earnings for workers who were union members (\$1,090 versus \$1,263).” This is easily explained away by two factors: professionals and skilled workers are more likely to be organized by the state unions than unskilled workers, and the state unions are overwhelmingly organized in states that have a higher minimum wage than the federal minimum wage. Put simply, the state unions organize more workers that benefit from favorable labor market conditions. Which makes sense on their part, since workers with higher incomes generate more income from dues. In fact, according to the BLS, nonunion wages exceed union wages in certain occupations,⁵³ with legal occupations actually having a few hundred dollar weekly difference in favor of nonunion workers. Median weekly earnings of “professional and related occupations” are lower for union employees than nonunion employees. The same is true on average in the

manufacturing industry as well as wholesale trade and telecommunications.

This should not be written off as a minor accident. In manufacturing in 2023, the median weekly earnings for a worker represented by a union was \$1107 compared to \$1153 for nonunion workers. This means that manufacturing workers are paying dues to labor organizations that are “organizing” them to be exploited at a *higher* rate. *This fact alone completely obliterates any pretense that the state unions represent the economic interests of the workers.* These people are supposed to be the hard core of the proletariat. The manufacturing, resource extraction, and logistics proletarians ought to be the leaders of all the exploited and oppressed people in the US. A Communist Party cannot exist in this country without the active leadership of these people. Yet it is exactly these people who are shunted aside by the state unions and their “socialist” lackeys.

Within the economy as a whole, public sector employees are about 1/6th the total number of private sector employees. Yet the number of organized workers is about the same: 7+ million in the public sector compared to 7.2 million in the private sector. The state unions are normally called that because they are corporatist offshoots of the bourgeois state whose policy is collectively determined by the bourgeoisie. In the US, however, this term has also taken on another dimension: they are also organizations of mainly state employees rather than workers in private capitalist enterprises.

In sum, the level of organization among American workers is at record lows. The exceptions are mainly among privileged groups like state employees, state contractors, or skilled professionals. The development of the state labor organizations mainly coincides with the Democratic Party machinery and reformist cooptation of important struggles. However, the comparatively low level of organized workers

overseen by the state unions is a stark contradiction with the historically unprecedented wealth they control.

End Notes:

Two

ASSETS OF THE LABOR ORGANIZATIONS

The state unions are 501(c)(5) organizations, which means they are required to file LM-2 forms that are publicly available through the Department of Labor website. This has led to a number of studies pointing out the exorbitant assets and salary outlays of the state unions as well as their continued dependence on obligatory wage deductions for the majority of their funding, virtually none of which goes towards organizing the unorganized workers or strike benefits. Financially, the state unions are little more than legally sanctioned graft machines and a pay pig for bourgeois politicians. The following data is taken from the Department of Labor's disclosure forms for the six largest state unions:

AFL-CIO’s American Federation of Teachers (AFT)

Year	Total Receipts (Income)	Strike Benefits	Rep Activities	Admin	Lobbying	Purchase of Investments/ Fixed Assets
2023	283,140,043	9,699,406	93,059,372	14,107,370	46,995,680	73,156,050
2022	265,158,605	10,498,827	85,483,594	10,822,559	35,762,365	3,275,962
2021	259,100,878	11,928,255	73,650,700	8,104,656	48,844,481	1,943,683
2020	253,013,736	10,886,360	71,108,444	13,075,946	31,266,948	3,744,852
2019	246,338,645	11,906,290	73,912,907	11,655,836	40,942,838	26,424,041
2018	363,313,112	10,177,759	76,103,716	10,927,621	31,180,053	11,368,346
2017	331,922,616	11,741,264	75,235,673	10,158,246	40,022,776	12,820,126
2016	327,867,371	10,943,548	77,641,055	8,622,692	28,593,202	6,825,148
2015	327,586,003	11,840,361	73,786,000	9,664,466	37,574,845	5,416,638
2014	344,705,062	12,401,649	72,554,531	7,997,375	24,873,345	5,310,321
Sum	3,002,146,071	112,023,719	772,535,992	105,136,767	366,056,533	150,285,167

AFL-CIO's American Federation of State, County, Municipal Employees (AFSCME)

Year	Total Receipts (Income)	Strike Benefits	Rep Activities	Admin	Lobbying	Purchase of Investments/ Fixed Assets
2023	207,360,174	0	36,467,500	12,077,215	27,803,227	855,845
2022	191,301,610	0	34,236,900	20,498,231	60,462,072	61,165,259
2021	184,227,062	0	28,611,322	9,529,592	25,731,457	546,017
2020	198,209,975	0	27,552,612	12,916,746	62,111,608	3,419,038
2019	197,131,218	0	33,770,492	11,546,371	26,394,712	58,500,234
2018	197,465,488	0	31,579,225	18,691,630	53,097,892	13,517,806
2017	199,023,956	0	35,037,038	11,252,733	26,506,599	55,954,548
2016	206,463,853	0	36,428,456	18,883,650	55,286,734	12,866,741
2015	185,969,934	0	39,547,552	13,825,625	27,163,272	44,721,985
2014	208,722,508	0	43,443,722	24,901,739	64,585,115	1,006,903
Sum	1,975,875,778	0	346,674,819	154,123,532	429,142,688	252,554,376

** Note that the \$0 on strike benefits in the last decade is not a phenomenon unique to AFSCME— IATSE also did this, and most likely other state unions not studied here.*

AFL-CIO's United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW)

Year	Total Receipts (Income)	Strike Benefits	Rep Activities	Admin	Lobbying	Purchase of Investments / Fixed Assets
2023	329,621,295	1,712,439	42,415,022	13,474,565	7,638,608	124,295,576
2022	317,541,653	259,053	44,410,921	8,647,077	10,984,879	101,079,863
2021	343,513,105	808,829	41,625,523	6,673,041	10,125,465	185,608,736
2020	311,826,258	574,173	40,969,876	6,643,664	16,763,057	100,647,402
2019	306,011,007	3,027,942	51,569,326	7,253,710	6,112,404	75,415,229
2018	292,225,555	60,044	51,383,941	12,859,105	8,770,797	63,097,028
2017	288,958,939	70,094	54,930,750	9,217,585	4,558,094	65,284,964
2016	271,319,138	258,649	54,987,630	7,026,893	5,968,455	59,279,528
2015	281,479,788	276,370	57,805,136	6,481,139	3,397,046	30,450,391
2014	279,187,175	973,501	56,107,190	6,410,692	9,279,273	62,453,072
Sum	3,021,683,913	8,021,094	496,205,315	84,687,471	83,598,078	867,611,789

International Brotherhood of Teamsters (IBT)

Year	Total Receipts (Income)	Strike Benefits	Rep Activities	Admin	Lobbying	Purchase of Investments / Fixed Assets
2023	242,027,844	8,232,916	57,935,613	19,846,021	8,448,891	41,066,728
2022	225,328,310	5,296,101	47,517,778	17,561,722	9,079,914	23,556,759
2021	210,845,147	5,871,418	46,856,917	33,680,668	9,904,222	25,300,124
2020	206,613,081	1,248,315	45,346,232	20,266,386	13,160,653	26,099,292
2019	213,156,761	1,161,971	58,575,624	19,319,210	10,072,841	30,586,807
2018	204,862,240	1,637,112	57,020,576	20,797,135	12,701,608	23,828,721
2017	199,297,515	1,511,378	51,851,524	25,077,294	8,523,240	31,229,119
2016	190,830,959	1,825,054	50,090,678	40,694,686	7,761,175	19,385,050
2015	191,120,017	841,240	51,511,023	23,561,495	8,467,714	23,511,720
2014	182,909,773	2,184,260	48,620,600	21,383,468	7,988,895	18,047,262
Sum	2,066,991,647	29,809,765	515,326,565	242,188,085	96,109,153	262,611,582

Service Employees International Union (SEIU)

Year	Total Receipts (Income)	Strike Benefits	Rep Activities	Admin	Lobbying	Purchase of Investments/ Fixed Assets
2023	287,957,187	0	143,218,397	25,325,185	50,092,536	3,052,031
2022	259,089,755	55,131	129,050,929	11,569,604	63,545,003	108,346,907
2021	320,850,726	117,840	133,010,854	8,495,385	64,385,837	56,561,158
2020	318,882,521	301,326	123,206,028	13,694,963	60,055,717	43,256,444
2019	403,518,425	307,714	123,125,958	12,967,121	35,542,505	94,353,190
2018	342,972,253	29,725	131,264,112	12,941,744	44,834,295	33,300,113
2017	314,668,065	198,918	146,245,752	16,832,482	33,251,868	5,322,537
2016	304,242,320	229,768	142,360,838	30,605,475	61,600,169	6,117,327
2015	321,317,483	3,950	152,244,072	21,246,601	27,735,155	21,159,500
2014	321,679,907	203,287	153,609,185	18,334,341	47,908,445	16,072,840
Sum	3,195,178,642	1,447,659	1,377,336,125	172,012,901	488,951,530	387,542,047

National Education Association (NEA)

Year	Total Receipts (Income)	Strike Benefits	Rep Activities	Admin	Lobbying	Purchase of Investments/ Fixed Assets
2023	529,588,371	30,916	39,280,224	56,926,364	50,145,612	115,871,136
2022	608,172,564	105,649	37,932,085	44,472,430	41,557,306	197,097,923
2021	588,158,648	0	32,314,003	34,156,509	65,999,387	241,375,130
2020	603,332,048	114	35,759,179	39,890,459	50,728,949	285,728,381
2019	390,082,960	3,521	42,400,542	51,211,869	36,519,476	53,282,820
2018	391,784,284	53,091	42,485,096	51,229,347	26,746,513	2,798,828
2017	385,079,628	17,512	43,704,842	55,284,518	53,306,556	4,039,371
2016	387,654,396	32,853	46,503,911	58,686,641	43,029,434	13,659,271
2015	388,805,450	36,359	48,236,412	56,831,793	40,988,442	8,327,296
2014 *	385,068,391	11,755	44,915,308	54,381,725	31,419,232	6,551,815
Sum	4,657,726,740	291,770	413,531,602	503,071,655	440,440,907	928,731,971

**This year there was \$100,711,521 given away in
“Contributions, Gifts, and Grants”.*

The AFT, AFSCME, UFCW, IBT, SEIU, and NEA have taken in a combined \$17,919,602,791 over the last decade. They have spent a total of \$151,594,007 on strike benefits, or 0.8% of their revenue, or about \$1.60 per member per year. This is compared to a whopping \$1,904,298,889 on “political activities and lobbying”—essentially just two billion robbed from the workers and handed over to the Democrats. Even this pales in comparison to the amount spent on investments and fixed assets, which totals \$2,849,336,932 over the last decade.

Thus, it can be seen that what William Foster called “trade union capitalism” has developed to an incredible degree in the contemporary labor movement. Foster noted in his book *Misleaders of Labor* that trade unions in the 1920s had become capitalists in their own right through the conscious efforts of the reactionary bureaucrats. The trade union capitalist ventures in his time were valued at hundreds of thousands of dollars, or the low millions of dollars at their peak, and the reactionary bureaucrats commanded salaries of thousands of dollars, at most tens of thousands of dollars at the very top during boom times. Billions of dollars in assets and hundreds of millions of dollars in annual revenue was absolutely unthinkable. This is how deeply degenerated the American labor movement is and how thoroughly corrupted by American imperialism these organizations have become. The six largest labor unions in America over the past decade have spent an enormous \$5,182,830,829 on representational activities and union administration, which in practice largely means paying the salaries of professionalized business agents, labor lawyers, accountants, staffers, etc., not funding actual shop floor or building level machinery. These six organizations, who all together represent over nine million people or a majority of “organized labor”, are a five billion dollar parasite riding on the backs of the proletarians and lower petty bourgeoisie.

There are also other assets whose total valuation can only be presumed. There is Amalgamated Bank, majority owned by

the SEIU-affiliate Workers United, which controlled \$7.8 billion in assets as of 2023. There are the pension funds which run into the hundreds of billions of dollars, although Biden still spent tens of billions to keep them afloat, notably the Central States Pension Fund⁵⁴ which was notorious for its use as a mob slush fund. Compensation for union bureaucrats is in the six figures, with bottom-level Teamsters business agents pulling in over \$100k a year for “representational activities” plus spending on random cars, phones, trips, etc. (For instance, the Teamsters “Women’s Conference” in Puerto Rico or Joint Council 25 Women’s Committee’s Second Quarter Meeting, which had the following: “Crafting Session: Attendees created beautiful summer decorations perfect for their doors or patios. Dance Workshop: A world champion bachata dancer from the Latin Street Dance Company taught the basic moves of bachata. Culinary Delights: The participants enjoyed delicious Mexican cuisine, adding to the festive atmosphere of the meeting.”)⁵⁵

The upper bureaucrats pull multiple hundreds of thousands of dollars per year, with Laborers Union General President Terence O’Sullivan taking over a half million per year in salary plus hundreds of thousands of dollars in other compensation.⁵⁶ The following data was taken from the Department of Labor’s public disclosure room’s tool that allows people to search by agent. This is the total compensation from the unions (i.e. these figures do not include things like speaking fees, compensation from other positions in government or the Democratic Party, book deals, etc) of the top officers of the largest state unions in the US (organization and dates below):

New Labor Press Selected Writings, 2023-2024

Sean O'Brien	IBT since 2000	\$5,451,452
Elizabeth Shuler	IBEW 2005-2011 AFL-CIO since 2011	\$4,302,396
Mary Kay Henry	SEIU since 2001	\$5,852,601
April Verrett	SEIU since 2001	\$3,166,092
Shawn Fain	UAW since 2000	\$1,959,217
Matthew Loeb	IATSE since 2000	\$8,847,723
Douglas McCarron	UBC since 2000	\$11,102,887
Rebecca Pringle	NEA since 2001	\$4,332,860
Lee Saunders	AFSCME since 2001	\$7,615,764
Marc Perrone	UFCW since 2000	\$7,149,361
David McCall	USW since 2000	\$4,025,970
Randi Weingarten	AFT since 2000	\$9,655,838
Brent Booker	LIUNA since 2001	\$6,006,470
Claude Cummings	CWA since 2003	\$2,875,853

Thus, these fourteen bandits by themselves account for a total of \$82,344,484 robbed from working people. (The fact that Shawn Fain is far below his peers in terms of wealth stolen likely indicates off-book sources of income.) The

following table from Radish Research is highly instructive concerning the extreme upward trend in trade union capitalism:

In short, while the membership of the state unions dwindles even further, the assets of these organizations continues to rise, enriching an extremely corrupt and thoroughly reactionary bureaucracy in the process. The continued degeneration of imperialism, and by extension the state unions, has further developed their most reactionary internal features. The line of imperialist class collaboration has greatly enriched the state unions but it has also driven these organizations further down the road of fascization.

Three

INTERNAL FEATURES OF THE LABOR ORGANIZATIONS

The state unions are defined by their bourgeois political line, which in turn is guaranteed and consolidated through their material incorporation into the bourgeois state apparatus. This is the factor that determines everything about their internal and external relations. Nevertheless, there are a number of secondary internal features of the state unions that should be studied as the logical consequence of their political bankruptcy. The total absence of exposure literature makes it hard to tell the exact scope of some of these problems, but nonetheless, we briefly wish to highlight these major issues that confront members.

The first internal feature is the total lack of democracy in the American labor movement. Decades of reformism, repression, and state intervention have reduced the internal functioning of the American unions to a bureaucratic machine dominated by political and nepotistic appointments. Labor Notes even admitted, “Only 20 percent of all union members, or 2.7 million, have the right to directly elect their top officers.”⁵⁷ This figure from Labor Notes is actually highly deceptive. They included the UAW and IBT as unions with “one member, one vote”. In reality, not any member can run as a candidate in these elections. While it may be true that there is “one member, one vote,” in reality the average member has no control over who is eligible to be voted for, as candidates need a certain proportion of officers to support their candidacy at the convention. On top of this, the average member has absolutely zero ability to organize economic action. In the UAW, strikes can only be called by the executive board, and in the IBT, like in virtually every state union, economic action is *de facto* banned. This is accomplished by signing agreements that ban strikes and slowdowns then simply signing another agreement that bans strikes and slowdowns before the members can organize anything. So if the 1.6

million Teamsters and UAW members are deducted from the Labor Notes figure, that more than halves it. If practical considerations were taken into account, it would have to be admitted that no unions in the US are “democratic”, as evidenced by the fact that all of them are led by career bureaucrats and Democrat hacks.

The second internal feature, which is also the result of imperialist degeneration of the labor movement and closely tied to the first feature, is the (interlinked but distinct) oppression of national, racial and linguistic minorities within the unions. The new Teamsters administration, hailed up and down the revisionist press as the standard-bearers of “progress”, was immediately sued for \$2.9 million over racial discrimination.⁵⁸ Virtually the first action of the O’Brien administration was firing non-white employees who he declared were lazy. The Teamsters also made political donations to the Republican National Convention and has specifically supported Josh Hawley publicly and privately via a \$5k donation. Every state union has supported either the Republicans or Democrats and their various reactionary policies such as the campaign to expand the migrant detention system, which has included the construction of new concentration camps in areas far from the US-Mexico border. For instance, former Chicago Teachers Union darling Mayor Brandon Johnson of Chicago paid tens of millions to a private firm to set up a tent city for migrants—and then went on to speak at the Labor Notes 2024 conference.

Black workers are doubly oppressed by the modern state unionist system in nefarious and damaging ways. On the one hand, Black workers are more likely to be unionized under state unions, in large part due to their disproportionate employment in the unionized auto industry and unionized United States Postal Service (USPS). Thus, Black workers are dis-proportionally present in currently unionized logistics and manufacturing enterprises where state unions collaborate with the capitalists and state to suppress and extract maximum value from their employees. On the flip

side Black and other non-White workers are actively excluded by the state unions present in the semi-proletarian trades which thus limits their access to contracts, formal apprenticeship, and certifications in those unique competitive trades sectors⁵⁹. Anti-immigrant sentiment, national chauvinism, and racial discrimination in the American labor movement has been an issue from the start, and continues to be an issue, especially in the competitive trades where corrupt union leaders convert their organizations into white supremacist cartels. (For example, John Dougherty in Philadelphia.)⁶⁰ This little-analyzed dynamic of the Black workforce in the US is in part why: “Between 2019 and 2022, median wealth increased by \$51,800, but the racial wealth gap increased by \$49,950—adding up to a total difference of \$240,120 in wealth between the median white household and the median Black household.”⁶¹ Therefore it is completely reasonable to say that the *state unions are vehicles for white supremacy and national oppression*.

The third internal feature is gender-based oppression. Like other forms of discrimination, this has also been a mainstay of the American labor movement since its inception. For instance, the SEIU knowingly promoted men accused of sexual misconduct.⁶² The Newsguild actually threatened litigation against a labor reporter for exposing their internal sexual abuse.⁶³ ⁶⁴ Previous AFL-CIO President Trumka’s assistant Terry Stapleton, who was their chief budget officer, resigned after allegations of harassment were brought against him. Then-secretary-treasurer of the New Jersey AFL-CIO Laurel Brennan was quoted in Bloomberg acknowledging, “It’s an epidemic, *sexual harassment – we’ve all been there*.”

We’re still there.”⁶⁵ Misogyny in the state unions is the logical result of a corporate bureaucratic structure, which makes accountability and criticism impossible, as well as the bourgeois political line these organizations follow. Like with the struggle against national oppression and racial/linguistic

chauvinism in the labor movement, the state unions actively enable discrimination against women by ignoring hostile work environments and workplace harassment as essentially non-union issues.⁶⁶

Furthermore, the struggle of women workers to achieve their particular economic and political demands in the medical and education sectors, where women are dis-proportionally represented, is actively hindered and suppressed by the state unions grip on those industries. There can be no struggle against misogyny without a struggle against imperialism, and as the state unions are active collaborators of imperialism, it can conclusively said that *the state unions are materially vehicles for misogyny*.

The fourth internal feature is the fascization of the labor movement, which encompasses the above features and is represented most clearly recently in outright physical assaults on pro-Palestine workers and solidarity protestors. Aside from the numerous statements from union leaders in support of Israel, the Transport Workers Union in New York assaulted a pro-Palestine protester.⁶⁷ A similar attack was undertaken by a Teamster at the Rhode Island School of Design. (This was reported by the Ocean State Student Worker Alliance.) A vehicular assault was carried out by the SEIU against its own staff union.⁶⁸ (Note that April Verrett later replaced Mary Kay Henry as head of SEIU.) The number of statements in support of the fascist State of Israel are too numerous to recount here, as well as direct ties between the unions and Israel—such as Hoffa and the Teamsters providing “critical support to a struggling Jewish state”⁶⁹ An extremely telling commentary from the Times of Israel pointed out that, “To sway the teachers’ union to love Israel, Randi Weingarten criticizes it... Rather than join BDS, the Jewish president of the American Federation of Teachers hopes her group’s progressive Zionist message will ‘help bring Israel to its better angels’.”⁷⁰ In other words, Weingarten, an acknowledged Zionist, is prepared to halfheartedly criticize Israel if only to undermine opposition

to it among the teachers. The history of the AFL-CIO in selling Israel to workers and eliminating anti-Zionism in the labor movement is well-documented in the bourgeois press.⁷¹ The state unions are also the primary representatives of police unions, some of the most fascist and reactionary organizations in the country. Their entire political line, both among the “left” state union and right state unions, consists fundamentally in a “patriotic” legalistic unionism which views themselves as a key part of creating a more harmonious imperialist society. *The state unions are thus*



mechanisms and vehicles for fascism, and Zionism in particular.

Teamsters General President Sean O'Brien (center front in baseball cap behind child) poses with Local 455, whose flag consists of a skull (the symbol of modern and historic fascist groups--in particular the Nazi SS--also known as the Totenkopf) imposed over a white circle in the middle of a solid red background--the openly anticommunist IBT is clearly imitating the Nazi flag. Note also the nationalist slogan "save American jobs".⁷²

Another important internal feature of the labor movement is the prevalence of organized crime. The above features are closely bound up with the development of organized crime and the fascization of the state unions. Organized labor in the

US has always been closely tied to organized crime, and today is no different. There is no way of systematically studying this, since by definition it is conspiratorial—however, there are some telling facts from the Department of Labor: “The Department of Labor’s (DOL) Office of Labor-Management Standards (OLMS) has investigated and prosecuted union leaders for embezzling more than \$100 million in union dues since 2001; Investigations by the DOL’s Office of Inspector General, which investigates labor racketeering and organized crime’s influence within the labor movement, has resulted in more than \$1 billion in fines, restitutions, and forfeitures; *Fewer than 5 percent of unions audited by the DOL received unqualified passes.*”⁷³ The Trotskyist World Socialist Website has pointed out a number of times that the current president of the UAW, Shawn Fain, was closely involved in the embezzlement and labor-management corruption schemes of the previous administration that resulted in multiple dismissals.⁷⁴ More recently, he was accused of withholding thousands of documents in order to obstruct investigation into UAW corruption. Current IBT General President Sean O’Brien also has a history of crime, with his father being an alleged affiliate of the Winter Hill Gang.⁷⁵ O’Brien himself was suspended from the IBT briefly for threatening members that opposed the Hoffa-picked candidate in local 251. Criminal scandals are basically omnipresent in the labor movement at every level—even TDU has had to admit it on occasion. (For instance, the Independent Review Board wrote a 125 page analysis of how Teamsters 107 channeled jobs to their friends and family that TDU exploited to promote themselves.⁷⁶ This scandal is identical to Rome Aloise’s conduct in the IBT on the West Coast, also exploited by TDU.)⁷⁷ Even the “progressive” unions, such as SEIU, are rife with embezzlement and tax fraud at the highest levels.^{78-22b-22c} It has gotten so bad that even Congress is embarrassed by it, with Education and the Workforce Committee Chairwoman Virginia Foxx (R-NC) penning public letters to a dozen major state unions essentially asking them to cut back on corruption.⁷⁹ Foxx, of course, only made the

extremely modest acknowledgment that, “Over the past decade [2014-2024] OLMS has reported 725 federal indictments and 693 convictions of union officials and other union associates. The Committee’s oversight efforts on just a dozen private-sector unions involve more than \$3.2 million in embezzlement and \$220,000 in bribery.” If the rate of recovery for wage theft were extrapolated to penalties for embezzlement and fraud, one would have to assume this is at best one-hundredth the full picture. *In short, the state unions are vehicles for the extreme degenerate elements of the petty bourgeoisie.*

There is one other secondary feature that bears mentioning, and that is the internal division of labor that has become standard among the state unions. The state union general presidents and trustees carry on their class collaborationist policy with the state and they function as a wing of management inside the corporations they “organize”. (“Labor-management relations” is even a field of study in some universities, where professors assign readings from Labor Notes.) While this is going on, different caucuses and “rank-and-file” organizations try to mobilize the membership. Just in the last year, “Reform UFCW”, “Independent Teamster Organizing Committee”, and “Reform ALU” formed, even though the latter has not even negotiated a first contract. (Reform ALU actually immediately capitulated to the opportunist ALU leadership after an ALU organizer was fired by Amazon, then went on to promote “affiliation with the IBT” which they “vigorously fought for”.)⁸⁰ Teamsters Mobilize also recently formed almost immediately after the previous reform slate, Teamsters for a Democratic Union, took power in the IBT. (TM even attended the most recent TDU convention!) There is also the IATSE caucus CREW (Caucus of Rank-and-file Entertainment Workers) which outright states, *“Is CREW against IATSE's leadership? No, CREW is invested in making changes to the IATSE internal structure that makes IATSE more responsive and receptive to its members, such as giving members the right to vote for their international*

leadership and giving each member equal say in ratifying their contracts. *We have no issues with IATSE leadership* as individuals but we want to ensure that the structure in place allows members proper representation." At the most recent National Association of Letter Carriers convention, the organization "Build a Fighting NALC" (BFN) was formed "in an effort to bring about more rank-and-file support" according to Fightback News, the organ of the revisionist Freedom Road Socialist Organization. Inter-union groups and internal caucuses like Railroad Workers United, Workers Strike Back, Solidarity Caucus, and all the others, are essentially just bureaucratic cliques trying to marshal their own resources to gain more for their faction. Not a single one of these groups has actually made a contribution to the trade union struggle, either theoretically through exposure literature or practically through organizing economic action. The only thing all these groups have in common is vaguely left wing sloganeering and factionalism. They actually defend the state unions by funneling would-be trade unionists into bureaucratic infighting.

They possess a level of flexibility that the 501(c)5 organizations do not, and are even less accountable to the union membership than the legally recognized leaders, whose conduct is expected to conform to NLRB and DOL standards. This division of labor was pioneered in the IBT and UAW, where the gangsters and racketeers were able to carry out the most openly reactionary, class collaborationist money-making schemes with total disregard for the "democratic" "militant" pretenses of their electors. To paraphrase Stalin, who sold out the UPSers? The Teamsters! Who protested against the sellout? The Teamsters! You pay your money and take your choice... [see "Division of Labour in the 'Socialist- Revolutionary' Party"] These petty bourgeois cliques, formed from degenerate elements of the bureaucracy and intellectuals, are an important social base for the development of fascism, whose program they are already implementing in the trade union movement. (See Mussolini's *The Doctrine of Fascism* to understand the

fascist conception of the trade unions as state organs for disciplining labor and bringing the workers' interests into line with the employers' interests, as well as the 1927 "Charter of Labor" for how this was actually implemented through corporatist organizations such as arbitration boards and labor courts.)

The dominant factions of the American labor movement, including these reformists, essentially agree with the fascist idea that, "*Only unions legally recognized and subject to state control have the right to legally represent the whole category of employers and workers for which they are constituted.*"⁸¹ Its worth noting that virtually the entire American labor movement has endorsed the PRO Act and demanded more funding for the corporatist NLRB. It's a curious phenomenon unique to the American labor movement that the most rabid supporters of the state unions feel compelled to cloak themselves in oppositionist terminology—such is the level of degeneration of these organizations. It is a question of division of labor, not of difference in political line. The division of labor is this: liberals join the revisionist/reformist groups, the fascist leaders of these groups tail the labor bureaucracy which tails the Democratic Party who collaborate with the Republican Party who organize fascist fighting organizations. The difference between the "progressive" labor bureaucracy and the hardcore reactionaries of the fascist squadrons sponsored by the state is obliterated by imperialism, a tendency noted by Lenin in *Imperialism and the Split in Socialism*. The Teamsters are the clearest possible example of this, where at UPS TDU supports O'Brien and at Amazon Reform ALU campaigns for ALU to join the Teamsters, who support Hawley who supported the January 6 events in DC. In this way, the "militant" "radicals" (read: liberals) become dupes of the fascists simply by virtue of their incompetence and lack of principle.

It has thus been shown that the secondary features of fascism are already present in the state unions to a large degree; the

state unions stand prepared to organize themselves as the storm troops of a fascist dictatorship should one arise in the United States. In the meantime they are hardcore reactionaries profiting off of corporatist organization based on subordination to the state and collaboration with private capital. This is carried out through formal and informal agreements and various semi-state and non-state entities such as arbitration boards, corporate grievance panels, and regulatory agencies such as the NLRB, Independent Review Board (in the IBT) and similar entities for judicial oversight. They are completely subordinated to the political line of American imperialism through their willing collaboration with the Democratic and Republican parties. As William Z Foster wrote in 1927, "Since then [1922], as we shall see further along, the heads of the unions have degenerated so fast and so far that now in many cases they are little better than Fascist agents, whose function it is to dragoon the working masses into still deeper and more helpless slavery to the employers (*Misleaders of Labor*).” A century later, it is obvious that this feature has only become more pronounced, and not less.

This is why it is vitally important that new labor organizers specifically combat these problems as they arise. These secondary reactionary aspects of the state unions are the consequence of imperialism’s influence on labor and its organizations. These problems arise from the spontaneous degeneration of imperialism independent from the will of individual bureaucrats or the programs of one or another slate.

Endnotes

Four

ACTIVITY OF THE LABOR ORGANIZATIONS (MEMBER ORGANIZATION)

It has already been pointed out that the American labor movement tends to overstate its actual level of organization. This is accomplished by selling different types of membership to the public and lumping inactive members with active ones. However, even if there was accurate data on active, working members of the American state unions covered by current collective bargaining agreements, this would *still* not reflect the full depth of their organizational degeneration. In the US, the average state union local carries out no organizing activity among its existing members. “Organizing” in the American labor movement is synonymous with sleazily convincing unaffiliated workers to join. There is no uniting the workers behind their own political and economic interests. The labor movement resembles a complex web of multilevel marketing schemes. One need only look at the major campaigns of the state unions in 2023 and the statistics concerning economic action to understand how meaningless their “organizing” is for the workers.

Far and away the highest profile organizing in 2023 was at UPS and the “Big Three” automakers of Ford, General Motors, and Stellantis, which is the international merged firm of Chrysler, Fiat and Peugeot. At UPS, there was no plan of action for a strike at all. The union bureaucrats held a halfhearted public relations stunt outside some UPS buildings—referred to as “practice pickets”—which was endlessly promoted in the capitalist and revisionist press. At UAW, the maneuver was even more cynical: a partial lockout was waged against the workers to soften them up for the sellout deal which was eventually successfully pushed through. This lockout was dishonestly called a “stand-up strike” as an attempt to portray it as the product of worker militancy and remind workers of the origins of the UAW in the class struggle in the auto industry. Instead of gathering

workers demands and withholding labor until they were met, workers were randomly instructed to stop working and were threatened with strike pay being withheld if they got employment elsewhere. In both cases, the deals were immediately followed by layoffs, wage reductions, and speedups. Thus the “activity” of the state unions is not trade union struggle, but perpetrating fraud and bribery on an industrial scale for the purpose of sabotaging the trade union struggle.

The program of the "left wing" state unions is important to consider in this regard. It is not simply a question of how many members are being driven to act, but what action they are being directed to take. And the following resolutions from the UE (United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers of America) are highly instructive. These resolutions are titled “Independent Rank-and-File Political Action” and “Aggressive Struggle”. These are a perfect representation of how the labor movement in the US is identified completely with grifting:

“THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT THIS 78th
UE CONVENTION:

“Calls on the union at all levels to educate our members about the necessity, effectiveness, and most useful strategies of workplace struggle, including the purchase and use of books such as the Troublemaker’s Handbook, published by Labor Notes; Calls on locals to ensure that proper democratic practices are in place to involve members in workplace struggle, including, when appropriate, stewards’ meetings and trainings; Urges greater publicity for gains achieved by our members through workplace struggle in the UE Steward, UE News, local union newsletters, and other union communications; Commits to transparency in all forms of negotiations with the employer; Calls on the union at all levels to: Participate in, support, and join Jobs with Justice, the Southern Workers’ Assembly,

and other formations that bring together unions and community organizations; Participate in the next Labor Notes Conference in Chicago on April 19-21, 2024; Encourages members and locals to participate in or assist the formation of Labor Notes Troublemaker schools, subscribe to Labor Notes, purchase bulk subscriptions and books, and submit articles for publication. [...] Encourages UE regions, locals, and members to become involved in Our Revolution, Labor for Our Revolution, Black Lives Matter, Fight for \$15, the Poor Peoples' Campaign, and other working-class movements for economic and racial justice... ."82 Only "gains"—real or imagined—are to be publicized. This is the crux of the entire trade union "literature" in the US and the method by which it was converted into an appendage of corporate public relations. Furthermore, "political action" is conceived of exclusively as getting involved in liberal corporatist groups and "aggressive struggle" means in reality buying Labor Notes products in bulk. The trade union press is virtually nonexistent. Where there is some semblance of a trade union press, it is nothing more than public relations work for the union bureaucrats and whatever companies and politicians they receive money from. For instance, the Spring 2024 of Teamster magazine printed the following under the title "A Good Teamster": "A good Teamster is patriotic and public-spirited; they have a deep devotion to the principles of democracy and free enterprise, and are quick to speak out against any forces which seek division; they are active in community affairs and work hard for good government—local, state, and national. A good Teamster is a good American and a good citizen." Only a couple pages later is glowing praise for Local 633 for achieving "the largest density of law enforcement groups of any union in New Hampshire." Exposure literature is actively fought against by the state unions, who are committed to portraying the companies they deal with as reasonable and generous custodians of the workers. The logic of

the union bureaucrats is simple: if the companies look bad, we look bad for collaborating with them, thus hampering our efforts to swindle other workers.

This has led to absolutely ludicrous claims passing from the lips of corporate representatives through the union bureaucrats to the capitalist press, such as: “UPS CEO says drivers will average \$170,000 in pay and benefits at end of 5-year deal”⁸³ and “Average Ford Worker Will Earn Six Figures By Their Fourth Year Under New UAW Offer”.⁸⁴

Organizing efforts are near-nonexistent among the proletariat. Even the Trotskyists lament that, “The seven largest NLRB elections in fiscal year 2023 were all graduate workers: Stanford, Yale, Boston University, University of Chicago, Johns Hopkins, Northwestern, and University of Southern California. These votes accounted for a remarkable 21% of all 64,411 NLRB ballots.”⁸⁵ The state unions have completely abandoned the proletariat and are simply swindling the students. There is no strategy determining where resources are allocated beyond return on investment and short term profits. Right now Amazon and Starbucks are the main focus, but even they get few to no organizing resources compared to how much is dumped into public relations and lobbying.

The activities listed in the UE resolutions, plus speaking panels, is basically the entire practice of the American labor movement, aside from the actual crimes listed among the secondary features of these organizations. It is very hard for any worker to take the labor movement seriously precisely for these reasons. It is not even possible to call these “tactics” because tactics implies a confrontation with the enemy. There is no need for tactics when the AFL-CIO can simply enter a “partnership” with Microsoft in order to loot the tech workers.⁸⁶ There is no need for political action when the AFL-CIO can simply establish a “capital stewardship program”.⁸⁷ The AFL-CIO even equates workers’ rights with

"shareholder advocacy" and the need to defend the "important right that investors have to communicate with each other and the companies that they own."⁸⁸ *AFL CIO literally has its own trusts, a "building investment trust" and "housing investment trust".*⁸⁹

Compare this all to the typical practice of even business unionism pre-NLRB, much less the revolutionary industrial unionism of that time. Originally, trade unions of all political affiliations prior to the NLRB would establish a set of union or industry-wide "union rules" related to conditions and a "union rate" for wages. As the book *The State and the Unions* explains of pre-NLRB trade unionism:

"Usually, a union would approach an employer, irrespective of whether it had amongst its members a majority of his employees, and press him under threat of a strike to sign a contract bringing the wages and conditions of those of his employees within the union's jurisdiction into line with those established elsewhere as the going union rate or norm... Thus, the choice for the employer under the prevailing customs of collective bargaining was to recognize the union, which meant automatically accepting the accompanying conditions, or refuse and face the consequences – strikes and boycotts (Tomlins, *The State and the Unions*)."

We then see two key features of pre-NLRB trade unionism: 1) unions usually established a set of union-wide or industry-wide rules, rates and conditions they pushed for in all shops they organized regardless of the specific enterprise in question, and 2) recognition of the union meant simultaneously recognizing and agreeing to their already established set of industry-wide wage and contract demands.

In a brilliant stroke of capitalist policy, the politicians and business people behind the National Labor Relations Act which produced the NLRB directly attacked this trend by first separating out an employer's recognition of a union from their agreement to the union's wage and conditions

demands, and then second forcing unions who wanted to “play ball”, to get state support and mediation, to have to bargain on a company-by-company basis rather industry-wide.

Whereas union recognition and contract bargaining had once been viewed as essentially the same process, where agreeing to one meant agreeing to the other, now a company could recognize a union while also refusing to agree to any of its actual demands. This then compelled business unions, with the coercive support of the state, to differentiate and tailor their contracts to the needs and wants of the specific capitalists they were bargaining with rather than the demands of workers in their sector, which had originally drove their “union rate” and “union rules” policies. This act of taking collective bargaining out of the hands of the workers and into the sphere of hidden tripartite agreements between legally recognized ‘labor’ officials, capitalists, and the bourgeois state, something common to all state syndicalist systems, is what has materially driven even the most “militant” and “left-wing” state unions like the UE and UAW to divert most of their resources into lobbying, electoralism, and the closest possible “partnership” with the very capitalists they once opposed.

Thus the reality of the labor movement is that its power is at an absolute minimum. Millions of “members” are essentially totally unorganized, as proven by the strike numbers and the actual policies adopted by their “leaders”. The “members” are just jobs that the state unions own. The workers in these jobs are obligated to pay dues money to the labor corporations—and that is the full extent of their participation in the “labor movement”. The state unions don’t even have control over their own demands and contracts, whose enforcement and negotiation they gave away to the bourgeois legal mechanisms. When the SEIU claims that “Workers Ready to Make Decisive Impact in 2024 Elections” they mean they are ready to take \$200 million from workers to pay themselves to make a minor impact in Democratic polling.⁹⁰ The vast

majority of union “activity” is simply labor-management collaboration (incorrectly labeled “representational activities” on their LM-2 forms) and factional fighting over assets (incorrectly labeled “class struggle” by the radical liberals). Landlordism and finance capitalism, charity activities, and straight up advertising on behalf of the companies they ostensibly fight through promoting their agreements as “historic”, outright lying about wages and conditions, and promoting the “buy union” ideology—such is the actual practice of the majority of the American labor movement.

End Notes:

Five

INTEGRATION WITH THE STATE

Before analyzing the level of integration of the largest sections of the labor movement with the state, the state's attitude towards the labor movement and the policies of the Biden administration in particular must be clarified. This is particularly important since virtually all of the leaders of the major unions have explicitly praised “union Joe” and are actively collaborating with his administration in one way or another. Biden became the first sitting president to walk a picket line during the UAW's phony strike and was endorsed by all the major unions in 2020. The lavish praise, and in many cases, integration into his administration, continues in spite of the fact that the PRO Act (the potential golden goose of the state unions) has not been passed. The more openly hostile to American workers and lower petty bourgeoisie and the more money and arms given to fascist militias abroad, the more the state unions praise him as, “the most pro-union president in our lifetimes.”⁹¹ Biden's efforts to curb whatever remaining rights the state unions may have had—such as banning the railroad workers' strike in 2022, imposing the “Delivering for America” agenda on the USPS craft unions, rewarding Amazon with federal contracts in spite of their anti-union propaganda meetings, etc—have not deterred the state unionists in the slightest.

The Biden administration created a body called the White House Task Force on Worker Organizing and Empowerment, chaired by Vice President Kamala Harris and vice-chaired by then-Secretary of Labor Marty Walsh. The goal of the Task Force was described as: “identify executive branch policies, practices, and programs that could be used, consistent with applicable law, to promote my Administration's policy of support for worker power, worker organizing, and collective bargaining.”^{92-2b-2b-2c} There are two aspects to this policy: the first is the government acting as a “model employer”, i.e. through its own practices demonstrate the practices corporations should be adopting; the second is the

government acting as a “policymaker”, namely using incentives and punishments to compel corporations to adopt these practices. The Task Force includes more than twenty executive agencies, departments, and White House offices. And what labor-management practices does the Biden administration want the Task Force to spread? The Task Force seeks to “remove barriers to worker organizing and collective bargaining,” and it consulted “dozens of unions, employers, worker advocacy organizations, academics, labor agency officials, business leaders, and other stakeholders and experts” to figure out how to accomplish this. The most telling section of the Biden administration’s white paper on labor is the third section, aptly titled “Understanding History and Meeting the Moment”. Noting the widespread support for labor organizing, the Task Force said, “If all these workers [polled] had the union representation that they say they want, union membership would be four to five times higher than it is right now.” And if that wasn’t clear, “Increased interest in unions *must be met by corresponding and responsive changes in government policy and practices*, such as those contemplated by the recommendations in this report. [...] We need new laws today, just as we did in the 1930s.” Of course, all of the policy recommendations are based in an expansion of bureaucracy; “corruption”, “embezzlement”, and even “stoppage” never appear in the Task Force report. The backwards state of the labor movement is never even mentioned: for the Biden administration, it is a question of expanding the already-existing government control over a labor movement that they fear getting out of hand. And no doubt, this priority is completely in line with the state unions, who want neither to change their existing policy of institutionalized robbery nor to face competition from independent, class-conscious unions.

Biden actually summed up his relationship with the state unions (and by extension their membership) when he described them as “my domestic NATO”. And a representative of the labor bureaucrats succinctly summed

up their role to the Supreme Court as, “And what that means [if AFSCME loses the Janus case] their case against is that the key thing that has been bargained for in this contract for agency fees is a—a limitation on striking. And that is true in many collective-bargaining agreements. *The fees are the tradeoff. Union security is the tradeoff for no strikes.* And so if you were to overrule Abood, you can raise an untold specter of labor unrest throughout the country.”

The faction of capitalists organized in the Chamber of Commerce describe the Biden administrations union policy as a “whole of government approach”. What is notable about the Chamber of Commerce report on the “whole of government approach” is the alarm raised over the integration between labor and the state:

President Biden appointed Gwynne Wilcox and David Prouty to the NLRB. Both Member Wilcox and Member Prouty came to the NLRB after having served as counsel to unions for decades. President Biden also appointed Jennifer Abruzzo, a former NLRB career attorney who had spent over 20 years at the agency and had most recently served as General Counsel for the Communication Workers of America, to serve as the NLRB’s General Counsel. DOL’s Wage and Hour Division (WHD) has been led by Jessica Looman, the former executive director of the Minnesota State Building and Construction Trades Council. [...] President Biden named Celeste Drake, a longtime trade expert at the AFL-CIO, to serve as the director of the Office of Management and Budget’s newly created “Made in America” program, which is designed to direct more federal money to U.S. manufacturers. Ms. Drake was later promoted to Deputy Assistant to the president and deputy director of the National Economic Council. [...] Ms. Drake left the White House in August of 2023 and was immediately replaced by another longtime union official. [...] In 2021, the Office of Personnel Management’s director of

*intergovernmental affairs, Alethea Predeoux, was required to receive a waiver from the ethics executive order because she had previously served as the top lobbyist for the American Federation of Government Employees, the largest federal employee union.*⁹³

This does not even come close to an exhaustive list of union officials going into government and vice- versa. Marty Walsh was General Agent of the Boston Building Trades Council, Secretary of Labor, then Executive Director of the National Hockey League Players' Association. The White House Advisory Committee for Trade Policy and Negotiations included IBT General President Sean O'Brien, now- deceased International President of the USW Thomas Conway, and President of the AFL-CIO Liz Shuler.⁹⁴ An IBT "policy advisor" was appointed to a Department of Transportation "advisory committee".⁹⁵ The NEA's Becky Pringle was part of Obama's Advisory Commission on Educational Excellence for African Americans. There is also the President's Export Council,^{5b} which includes President Shaun Fain of the UAW and International President Brian Bryant of the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers, working alongside representatives from Ford and United Airlines among others. A full accounting of the integration between the bourgeois state and the labor movement is virtually impossible simply because of how rapidly bureaucrats move between local, state, and federal government, "progressive" NGOs, labor offices, and the Democratic Party. (For example, Vail Kohnert-Yount who went from Georgetown to an intern at the AFL-CIO's Center for Strategic Research to Special Assistant at the Bureau of International Labor Affairs at the Department of Labor to Harvard to Assistant Director, Region 9A of the UAW and at-large Executive Board member of the Connecticut AFL-CIO.)⁹⁶⁹⁷ Such is the logic of the American labor movement—there are no class enemies, only collaborators who haven't been brought in yet.

It was this perverted logic that led the Teamsters to beg

Amazon shareholders to hand the Amazon workers over to them, a pathetic and ill-fated endeavor that was documented in the Winter 2023 issue of Teamster magazine, in an article titled, “Amazon Driver Calls on Investors to Act.” The same mindset led the UAW to beg the US government to install them at a Mercedes-Benz plant in Alabama after they lost their certification vote.⁹⁸

So deep is the patronage and collaboration between the state unions and capitalist government that the state unions are now directly incorporated into the imperialist state’s infrastructure projects, which in turn is simply a nationalization of a policy that has been standard for Democratic Party-run states and municipalities since the rise of US state unionism. Under Executive Order 14063, issued by the Biden administration in early 2022, the Federal Government is required to collaborate with the state unions to create Project Labor Agreements (PLAs) (defined as a “pre-hire collective bargaining agreement”) on all “large-scale construction projects”. As the executive order reads, the imperialist state finds itself faced with the “special challenges” posed by “large-scale construction projects”, in particular the problem of ensuring “a steady supply of labor on contracts being performed” and the problem of “the risk of delay associated with labor unrest”. From this, by directly “pre-bargaining” all large Federal construction and infrastructure projects with the state unions, the state hopes to achieve “increased stability in Federal contracting” and “avoid labor-related disruptions on projects by using dispute- resolution processes to resolve worksite disputes and by prohibiting work stoppages, including strikes and lockouts”. This is the topsy turvy world of state syndicalism, where the imperialists want to employ workers organized under the establishment unions so that they can “prevent” the class struggle (strikes, stoppages and other “disruptions”) that might occur if non-unionized workers were employed instead! This of course makes complete sense to the state unionists and their lackeys on the “left”, who proclaim laws like this as “victories” because they divert more of the spoils

of American imperialism back to the labor aristocracy and professionalized labor official strata.

Having long ago abandoned any pretense of class struggle, and having no recourse to the legitimate demands and production power of the workers, there is nothing left for these people to do but beg. Truly, the American labor movement is a “movement of paupers”, albeit exceptionally highly paid ones. (See Stalin’s “Briefly About Disagreements in the Party”)

End Notes

CONCLUSION

The American labor movement has been decimated over the course of decades. By far the dominant line in the labor movement is state syndicalism. Not only are the state unions led by state officials, they disproportionately represent government employees. They are “state unions” in every sense of the word, from who leads them, who composes them, to who determines their policy. Their political line—collaboration with American imperialism—and the organizational and practical consequences of this line has been absolutely disastrous for the American workers. Not only this, but the American labor movement has degenerated so thoroughly as to be scarcely distinguishable from the fascist labor unions of the Hitler and Brezhnev types. (Ironically, it was none other than the CIA—which informally leads the AFL-CIO and the IBT—who noted the potential for independent unions in the social-imperialist USSR to “harm economic performance.”)⁹⁹ In reality, the heads of the American labor movement are already collaborating with the most reactionary agents of the bourgeoisie.

This is not nearly a thorough survey. The extremely low level of trade union consciousness and practice among the proletarians is an objective limit imposed on any discussion of the labor movement in the US. However, there are certain features which must be contended with if there is to be principled trade union unity. First of all, and the decisive feature that all the secondary problems stem from, is the bourgeois political line that the overwhelming majority of the labor movement currently follows. This political line was awarded a legal monopoly in the labor movement through the state—this is called state syndicalism, and it is not unique or original to the US, and it has its own course of development.

All of the reactionary features of the existing labor organizations and their offshoots—virtually none of which are even denied by the government or capitalist press—are

the logical result of a bankrupt political line that represents a thoroughly reactionary and degenerate class. This class is the American imperialist bourgeoisie. This class cannot rule without a vast staff capable of harnessing labor for its ends. This staff in practice is thousands of grifters, frauds, hacks, and criminals simply leeching off the hard work of millions of people. The American labor movement is top to bottom controlled by a diverse staff that possesses no progressive characteristics. The state bureaucracy is a ratchet that encourages degeneration, bureaucracy, and reaction while forbidding any demand that can't be resolved through a compromise with American imperialism.

The trade union struggle in the US is in a sad state of affairs. The backwardness of the trade unions acts as a brake on organizing the party of the proletariat. People tail it, simply fail to fight it, or even decide trade unions are irrelevant to the party. These deviations have always existed and will exist for a long time. There are certain basic facts of the labor movement that have to be taken into account in organizing the vanguard party of the proletariat.

1. The vast staff responsible for harnessing workers to American imperialism is incapable of building the revolutionary party of the proletariat; this is a logical impossibility as well as a practical one resulting from the inability of state syndicalism to organize the proletariat in production, and has been a key point separating Marxism from revisionism since the First World War.
2. The decline and present inactivity of the labor movement is the logical consequence of its main internal contradiction, between the necessity of relying on the organized economic power of the proletariat and the political line of the American imperialist bourgeoisie which weakens and disorganizes the proletariat. The only real path forward then is to break the hold the imperialist state has over the labor

movement through state syndicalism, and constructing a renewed independent, combative and class-conscious labor movement in its place. The proletariat has rightly turned away from the wreckers of the trade union struggle. The reformists are purely reactionary because rather than destroy state unionism they seek to improve it by making it more more “effective” and “militant”.

3. There is no reason to believe that a correct labor line will result in the majority of the proletariat being organized into trade unions under a dictatorship of the imperialist bourgeoisie. Genuine trade unionism will be met with severe repression that will keep absolute numbers of officially organized workers unstable and relatively low until victory. Pursuing “organization”—in the sense of simply raising the number of workers covered by agreements between the bourgeoisie and the state unions—is absolutely wrong and a fundamental misunderstanding of the tasks of the trade unions and the communists. In no struggle is it correct to privilege spontaneity over consciousness or quantity over quality. This leads to running in circles, as the labor movement has done over the course of decades, as well as defeatism.

The labor movement was able to reach these lows only thanks to the active intervention of the imperialist bourgeoisie and the failure of the communists to chart and implement a correct path for the proletarian labor movement. The basic facts of imperialism are both extremely obvious and systematically denied in the US labor movement. Chauvinism and patriotism are omnipresent and bribery is a way of life. Any labor organization that wants to be taken seriously has to contend with the basic facts of imperialist dictatorship. “What is the distinguishing feature of a dictatorship of the imperialist bourgeoisie? First of all, such a dictatorship means the rule of a bellicose and exploiting minority over the majority, the working people, who long for peace. [...] Secondly, a dictatorship of the

imperialist bourgeoisie is a clandestine, secret, disguised dictatorship designed to deceive the masses. [...] Lastly, a dictatorship of the imperialist bourgeoisie is a dictatorship based on coercion of the masses (Stalin, *The Plot Against the Revolution*).” American communists have always struggled with these basic features of imperialism, and due to this and other internal weaknesses have been consequently unable to correctly lead the trade union struggle. Without class-conscious, independent and combative leadership the labor movement instead hits new lows year after year under bourgeois state leadership

At the same time, more and more workers recognize the necessity of organizing themselves for the purposes of waging a tit-for-tat struggle with the capitalists. The effects of class collaborationism in the labor movement are undeniable. The disastrous record of the state unions and the revisionist parties in the class struggle cannot be covered up so easily after decades of backsliding in living and working conditions. The dialectics of the class struggle is a fact in the trade unions just like anywhere else.

Opportunism betrays the masses, the masses rise up, opportunism flares up in tow, and so on. As Lenin said in *Imperialism and the Split in Socialism*: “There is not the slightest reason for thinking that these [bourgeois labor] parties will disappear before the social revolution. On the contrary, *the nearer the revolution approaches*, the more strongly it flares up and the more sudden and violent the transitions and leaps in its progress, *the greater will be the part the struggle of the revolutionary mass stream against the opportunist petty-bourgeois stream will play in the labor movement*.” The legitimate communists and trade unionists in the US are those people organizing the revolutionary masses in the labor movement against the opportunist petty-bourgeois flood. As reactionary and backwards as the American labor movement is, the proletariat remains the most revolutionary class in human history. It is the task of these legitimate communists and

trade unionists in the US and their supporters to overcome the US proletariat's present state of disorganization, and break the parasitic connection the imperialist state has foisted upon it by way of state unionism and the public-private welfare apparatus. This is a necessary process that must be taken up in order to successfully smash the American bourgeois dictatorship, which is the center of world reaction, and in this way the US proletariat can take up its key role among the international working class as the ultimate grave-digger of US imperialism.

Editor's Note: Minor additions were made to this article on August 22. The sources added are those marked by a number and letter.

End Notes

Part Five

REVISIONISM AND ORGANIZED LABOR IN THE US

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Commentary

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“The development of the proletariat did not, and could not, proceed anywhere in the world otherwise than through the trade unions, *through reciprocal action between them and the party of the working class.*”

– Lenin, *Left-Wing Communism* [emphasis added]

COMMENTARY

This document traced the course of revisionism in the trade union movement and the various ideas that have become popular in the trade union movement in the US. Ideas like national chauvinism, class collaboration, and white supremacy continue to plague the American trade union movement. Immigrant and nationally oppressed workers continue to be a huge untapped reserve of working-class power that is ignored and even actively antagonized by the state unions. Revisionism in the trade union movement has a rich basis in the vast wealth of the state unions, and ideologically it comes from two different angles. The first is revising the role of the trade unions. The trade unions are supposed to be “schools of communism”, where the workers learn how to administer their own interests and how to manage industry. The second is revising the relationship between the trade unions and the Communist Party. The Party was turned into an appendage of the reactionary union leaders under Browderism, its leadership in the trade union movement was liquidated entirely under Avakianism, and even today the methods by which the Party leads the trade unions are often called into question. (Reformism, liquidationism, and factionalism continue to be the main “methods” used by “communists” in the trade union movement.) The need for communist ideology to distinguish between enemies and allies of the trade union masses is the objective basis for Party leadership in the trade union movement. Many people continue to advance the revisionist CPUSA analysis that the main split in the labor movement is between “militant” and “non-militant” elements in leadership, a crude productivist framework devoid of all political content, as opposed to any systemic analysis of why the trade unions in the US are so isolated from the working class and so blatantly reactionary.

INTRODUCTION

Over a century ago, William Foster—who would go on to lead the Communist Party USA and subsequently helped Browder liquidate it—wrote: “In every country but one, an advanced state of capitalism has produced a highly developed trade union movement. The single exception is the United States. Here we have a very elaborate industrial system and the world's most militant and powerful capitalist class, but, paradoxically enough, a trade union movement which, for general weakness and backwardness, has few if any equals in the predominantly industrial countries” (“The Principles and Program of the Trade Union Educational League”, March 1922, *The Labor Herald*). Nowhere in the world has the labor movement amassed such colossal assets as in the United States. All the workers have to show for the richest labor organizations in the world are a bunch of worthless collective bargaining agreements dictated by corporate lawyers and an aimless “movement” subordinated to the liberals’ electoral machine.

Yet just beneath the surface, monumental battles for leadership of organized labor have been taking place for a century and a half. It is absolutely untrue that the trade union movement in the United States is simply a movement of “settler unions” completely full of “[capitulators] to the white supremacist patriarchal imperialist state”.¹⁰⁰ This left-deviationist idea serves the purpose of denying the leading role of the proletariat in our revolution and directly serves the state’s control of the trade union movement by attributing its problems to the supposedly incurable backwardness of American workers. The reality is that the American trade union movement has suffered from a number of problems since its inception: inability of the communists to organize their own work and successfully differentiate between the representatives of the bourgeoisie and proletariat in the labor movement; inability to overcome production-related struggles that hinder the participation of the proletariat and boost the strength of the petty-

bourgeoisie; and the inability to overcome the influence of the bourgeoisie in the labor movement, both its repressive and concessionary plans, and its reactionary ideology which takes the form of patriotism, chauvinism, reformism, etc. Essentially, the struggle for science (in this case the correct application of communist theory to the trade union movement), the struggle for production, and the class struggle have developed under American imperialism in a way that has reduced the trade union movement to its present state of collapse.

Dialectical logic shows that the internal contradiction is primary. The external factor of imperialism's influence in the labor movement becomes operative according to the development of the trade unions, which in turn hinges on the development of higher working-class leadership, the Communist Party. At every major turn in the labor movement, the ability or inability of the communists and class conscious trade-unionists to lead was the decisive factor. *Thus, the common thread across the trade union movement is the struggle against revisionism*, or in other words, the struggle against class collaborationist leadership and for proletarian dictatorship.

Note that this is an examination of the ideas and trends of the trade-union movement in the US, and not an accounting of the consequences of those ideas. (For that, see "Political Economy of the American Labor Movement".) The fundamental premise of this document is that correct ideas are needed for successful labor organizing and that incorrect ideas are harmful to the interests of organized labor.

Revisionism is a term for bourgeois ideology inside the workers' movement:

"The movement is everything, the ultimate aim is nothing"—this catch-phrase of Bernstein's expresses the substance of revisionism better than many long disquisitions. To determine its conduct from case to case, to adapt itself to the events of the day and to the

chopping and changing of petty politics, to forget the primary interests of the proletariat and the basic features of the whole capitalist system, of all capitalist evolution, to sacrifice these primary interests for the real or assumed advantages of the moment—such is the policy of revisionism. And it patently follows from the very nature of this policy that it may assume an infinite variety of forms, and that every more or less ‘new’ question, every more or less unexpected and unforeseen turn of events, even though it changes the basic line of development only to an insignificant degree and only for the briefest period, will always inevitably give rise to one variety of revisionism or another.” [Lenin, *Marxism and Revisionism*]

Revisionism means the renunciation of the fundamental interests of the workers: therefore, it is axiomatic that revisionism is harmful to the labor movement and any serious class-conscious labor organizer must struggle against the influence of revisionist ideas.

End Notes

ORIGINS AND THE FIRST INTERNATIONAL

The colonial United States had a number of minor labor organizations composed of skilled craftsmen and indentured servants. However, the first trade union organizations emerged in the early 1800s among the rapidly-growing proletariat in the Northeast in the textile industry. The so-called “mill girls” in Lowell, MA, struck multiple times in the 1830s as did textile workers in Paterson, NJ in 1835. The North Adams Strike of 1870 was a strike of shoemakers which was defeated through the import of scabs from China. Outside of the textile industry, the logistics industry saw some of the earliest mass labor actions, such as the Chinese Railroad Strike of 1867, the Great Railroad Strike of 1877, and the Great Southwest Railroad Strike of 1886. In 1872, workers from more than 30 trades in New York went on strike for an eight hour day, called the Great Strike, which was defeated.¹⁰¹ These early labor actions were characterized by the extreme violence of the state in response, and the frailty of the organizations involved, as there was no national trade union organization until the creation of the Knights of Labor. (The short-lived National Labor Union was more like a proto-labor party that had trade-unionists in it. In fact, the 1870 convention of the NLU created the Labor Reform Party and the platform of the NLU adopted in 1868 actually advised workers to actively participate in the US’ genocidal westward expansion: “This Congress would most respectfully recommend to the workingmen of the country that in case they are pressed for want of employment, they proceed to become actual settlers” [retrieved from *Misleaders of Labor*]. The NLU also suffered from a conciliatory attitude towards slaveowners, especially in Northern port cities that benefited from trade with the south.)¹⁰²

The first truly national trade union, the Knights of Labor (officially the Noble and Holy Order of the Knights of Labor) was created in 1869. It was founded by Uriah Stephens, a garment worker, although the later leader Terence Powderly

is a better representative of the opportunism of this organization.

Members of the Knights of Labor had to accept the following to join:

“Labor is noble and holy. To defend it from degradation; to divest it of the evils to body, mind, and estate which ignorance and greed have imposed; to rescue the toiler from the grasp of the selfish, is a work worthy of the noblest and best of our race. We mean no conflict with legitimate enterprise, no antagonism to necessary capital; but men, in their haste and greed, blinded by self-interests, overlook the interests of others, and sometimes violate the rights of those they deem helpless. We mean to uphold the dignity of labor, to affirm the nobility of all who earn their bread by the sweat of their brows. We mean to create a healthy public opinion on the subject of labor (the only creator of values), and the justice of its receiving a full, just share of the values or capital it has created.”¹⁰³

A number of glaring theoretical errors already present themselves just in this short vow. The claim that labor is the only creator of value was criticized by Marx in the first section of *Critique of the Gotha Programme*: “Labor is not the source of all wealth. Nature is just as much the source of use values as labor, which itself is only the manifestation of a force of nature, human labor power.” The materialist explanation of exploitation as the logical consequence of production for profit is replaced by an idealist conception of men “blinded by self-interests” guided by “haste and greed”. The issue is further confused by aspiring to “no conflict with *legitimate* enterprise” and “no antagonism to *necessary* capital”. Even worse, the only aims are “uphold the dignity of labor” (dignity is the catchword of liberal sellouts to this day) and “receiving a full, just share of the values or capital it has created” (This is a paraphrase of the “fair day’s pay for a fair day’s work” principle which is written into some union

contracts today, for instance, the UPS-IBT agreement Article 37 Section 1.).

The Knights of Labor were guided by a petty-bourgeois conception of the trade union movement which denies the fundamental antagonism between labor and capital and reduces the trade unions to a sort of church preaching on behalf of labor. They were part of a trend that was represented theoretically by the European intellectuals Ferdinand Lassalle and Pierre-Joseph Proudhon. Proudhon opposed unions and strikes on the grounds that it would lead to a rise in prices for everyone, and therefore would either accomplish nothing or even make things worse generally for workers. (There is no need to strike against “legitimate” or “necessary” exploitation!) Marx had criticized this idea in *The Poverty of Philosophy* in 1847:

“In the first place, there is no general rise in prices. If the price of everything doubles at the same time as wages, there is no change in price, the only change is in terms. Then again, a general rise in wages can never produce a more or less general rise in the price of goods.

Actually, if every industry employed the same number of workers in relation to fixed capital or to the instruments used, a general rise in wages would produce a general fall in profits and the current price of goods would undergo no alteration.

“But as the relation of manual labor to fixed capital is not the same in different industries, all the industries which employ a relatively greater mass of capital and fewer workers, will be forced sooner or later to lower the price of their goods. In the opposite case, in which the price of their goods is not lowered, their profit will rise above the common rate of profits. Machines are not wage-earners. Therefore, the general rise in wages will affect less those industries, which, compared with the others, employ more machines than workers. But as

competition always tends to level the rate of profits, those profits which rise above the average rate cannot but be transitory. Thus, apart from a few fluctuations, a general rise in wages will lead, not as

M. Proudhon says, to a general increase in prices, but to a partial fall – that is a fall in the current price of the goods that are made chiefly with the help of machines.

“The rise and fall of profits and wages expresses merely the proportion in which capitalists and workers share in the product of a day’s work, without influencing in most instances the price of the product. But that ‘strikes followed by an increase in wages culminate in a general rise in prices, in a dearth even’ – those are notions which can blossom only in the brain of a poet who has not been understood.” [emphasis added]

Proudhon rejected the possibility of the trade unions having any positive influence whatsoever on the workers. Lassalle, on the other hand, wrongly believed the trade unions and worker cooperatives— simply by virtue of existing—would automatically improve the condition of the working-class: “For must not the increased demand, on the part of the employer, tend to raise the wages of the workers! Are not the proprietors of large works thus obliged to offer their employees the very best conditions of labor, because they otherwise risk their men going over to already existing co-operative associations, or indeed, of themselves starting one, a proceeding to which, of course, the ablest and most energetic workers would most incline? Assuredly, only [!] by these means – *by the workers themselves competing with the employers* – can wages be permanently raised, and the conditions of labor generally improved, and never [!], as we have seen, can this be permanently accomplished by compulsory laws or by appeals to humanity.”¹⁰⁴ Marx and Engels correctly fought against these ideas in the First International, by exposing the faulty economic arguments

and bourgeois apologia of Proudhon and the reformist negation of political struggle by the trade unions of Lassalle. Yet these ideas, which erase the political line of the trade unions and promote capitulation to the bourgeoisie, were widespread in the Knights of Labor and persist today through the corporate enterprises (including trusts and hedge funds) found in the American labor movement.

The Knights of Labor were not simply theoretically weak. Their weak theory was an expression of their petty-bourgeois world outlook, which reached its reactionary peak in their war drive against foreign- born Chinese workers. The problem was described by the Knights in "The Knights of Labor on the Chinese Labor Situation": "Here [in the Chinese immigrant community] we have before us the conditions against which the whole power [!] of the Knights of Labor will be hereafter arrayed. [This was in 1886, at the peak of its membership, which rapidly declined from this point!] When it is borne in mind that there are fully one hundred and twenty-eight thousand Chinamen in this State, it will be at once seen that the loss to the State by this non-consumption is immense. This places the question forward in its proper light. As Knights of Labor, we claim that the importation of an element of this character for the purpose of cheapening or underbidding our native muscle is an outrage on civilization, Christianity, and political economy."¹⁰⁵ Thus, at the first peak of organized labor's power in the United States, the ideological and political problems of national chauvinism and class collaborationism against other workers were already becoming major obstacles to a correct class-conscious unionist center. It is a straight line in the labor movement from the Knights of Labor rallying American workers against Chinese workers 150 years ago to the International Brotherhood of Teamsters rallying American workers against Iraqis in the lead-up to the invasion of 2003.

Despite the poor leadership of the Knights of Labor, the collapse of the First International, and the extremely difficult circumstances of strikes which made victories for organized

labor rare, significant class battles took place during this period which paved the way for the creation of the American Federation of Labor and the further expansion of the trade union movement. The Pullman Strike (led by Eugene Debs) and the Bituminous Coal Miners' Strike in 1894, in which the Knights played no role, signaled the end of the Knights of Labor as a force of organized labor in American political life.

The final word on this era of the American labor movement belongs to Engels, who wrote in the preface to the American edition of *The Condition of the Working Class in England* in 1887:

“The second great section of the American movement [the first was the Georgists, an anti-landlord movement] is formed by the Knights of Labor. And that seems to be the section most typical of the present state of the movement, as it is undoubtedly by far the strongest. An immense association spread over an immense extent of country in innumerable ‘assemblies,’ representing all shades of individual and local opinion within the working class; the whole of them sheltered under a platform of corresponding indistinctness and held together much less by their impracticable constitution than by the instinctive feeling that the very fact of their clubbing together for their common aspiration makes them a great power in the country; a truly American paradox clothing the most modern tendencies in the most medieval mummeries, and hiding the most democratic and even rebellious spirit behind an apparent, but really powerless despotism

— such is the picture the Knights of Labor offer to a European observer. But if we are not arrested by mere outside whimsicalities, we cannot help seeing in this vast agglomeration an immense amount of potential energy evolving slowly but surely into actual force. The Knights of Labor are the first national organization created by the American working class as a whole;

whatever be their origin and history, whatever their shortcomings and little absurdities, whatever their platform and their constitution, here they are, the work of practically the whole class of American wage-workers, the only national bond that holds them together, that makes their strength felt to themselves not less than to their enemies, and that fills them with the proud hope of future victories. For it would not be exact to say, that the Knights of Labor are liable to development. They are constantly in full process of development and revolution; a heaving, fermenting mass of plastic material seeking the shape and form appropriate to its inherent nature. That form will be attained as surely as historical evolution has, like natural evolution, its own immanent laws. Whether the Knights of Labor will then retain their present name or not, makes no difference, but to an outsider it appears evident that here is the raw material out of which the future of the American working-class movement, and along with it, the future of American society at large, has to be shaped."

End Notes

**EARLY MODERN ERA AND THE SECOND
INTERNATIONAL**

The collapse of the Knights of Labor happened simultaneously with the development of the American Federation of Labor, which formally organized itself out of former Knights organizations and the Federation of Organized Trades and Labor Unions (led by Samuel Gompers) in December, 1886.

Gompers justifiably considered his “pure and simple unionism” at the time as a step forward for the trade union movement compared to the quasi-religious work of the Knights. For instance, his speech “What Does Labor Want”¹⁰⁶ in 1893 lays out his vision for a trade union movement guided by the struggle for an eight hour working day, an end to child labor (which he described as forcing infants into “the maelstrom of wage slavery”), “more school houses and less jails”, “more books and less arsenals”, “more leisure and less greed”, etc. At the same time, Gompers preached against workers wreaking “revenge” on the capitalists and said, “One of the greatest impediments to a better appreciation by the capitalists of *the devoted efforts of the Trade Unions to establish harmony in the industrial relations*, has been the perverted view taken by the capitalists in regarding their capital as essentially if not absolutely their own, whereas, the Trade Unions taking a more comprehensive and purer view, regard all capitals large and small, as the fruits of labor's economies and discoveries, inventions and institutions of many generations of laborers and capitalists, of theoreticians and practitioners, practically as indivisible as a living man.” Thus, while Gompers represented a step away from Christian idealism and towards explicit economic demands supported by the workers, this was part of a vision of the trade unions as co-stewards of industry alongside the capitalists. In his view, the ultimate aim of the trade unions was not the dictatorship of the proletariat, but “establishing harmony” in capitalist industry. (Albeit a “harmony” based on concessions

voluntarily granted by the capitalists.)

This ideology was known as Economism in Russia, and was fiercely fought by Lenin and Stalin over the course of multiple decades. Actually, the ideological struggles around the Second International, against the leadership of Bernstein and Kautsky and company, acquired immediate importance for the American trade unions, as the AFL under Gompers affiliated to the International Secretariat of National Trade Union Centres (later known as the International Federation of Trade Unions, aka the “yellow international” or “Amsterdam international”), the international trade union organization of the Second International. This is how Stalin characterized the role of the Economists in the labor movement in Russia:

“They displayed no interest in the organization of a Social-Democratic workers' party [read: Communist Party] in Russia; on the contrary, they regarded the organization of a party as a ridiculous and amusing game which would hinder them in the execution of their direct ‘duty’— to wage the economic struggle. Strikes and more strikes, and the collection of kopeks for strike funds—such was the alpha and omega of their activities.

“You will no doubt think that since they have whittled down their tasks to such a degree, since they have renounced Social-Democratism, these worshippers of the spontaneous ‘movement’ would have done a great deal, at least for that movement. But here, too, we are deceived. The history of the St. Petersburg movement convinces us of this. Its splendid development and bold progress in the early stages, in 1895-97, was succeeded by blind wandering and, finally, the movement came to a halt. This is not surprising: all the efforts of the ‘Economists’ to build up a stable organization for the economic struggle invariably came up against the solid wall of the government and were always shattered

against it. The frightful regime of police persecution destroyed all possibility of any kind of industrial organization. Nor did the strikes bear any fruit, because out of every hundred strikes, ninety-nine were strangled in the clutches of the police; workers were ruthlessly ejected from St. Petersburg and their revolutionary energy was pitilessly sapped by prison walls and Siberian frosts. We are profoundly convinced that this check (relative of course) to the movement was due not only to external conditions, the police regime; it was due no less to the check in the development of the very ideas, of the class consciousness of the workers, and, hence, to the waning of their revolutionary energy. Although the movement was developing, the workers could not widely understand the lofty aims and content of the struggle because the banner under which the Russian workers had to fight was still the old faded rag with its farthing motto of the economic struggle; consequently, the workers were bound to wage this struggle with reduced energy, reduced enthusiasm, reduced revolutionary striving, for great energy is engendered only for a great aim.” [*History of the CPSU(b)*]

Thus in this era, the trade unions were torn between the—supposedly—politically neutral organizers united behind the drive for more money and better benefits, and the class-conscious trade unionists who either fought in the old unions or joined then-new labor organizations such as the syndicalist Industrial Workers of the World. (This was a precursor to debates in the Third International around the alleged universality of certain tactics in the labor movement, namely, dual-unionism and “boring-from-within”.)

The Industrial Workers of the World was intended to be an international industrial union for abolishing the wage system. The socialist Eugene Debs and the syndicalist Daniel DeLeon were important leaders in the IWW, although DeLeon later led a split from the IWW to form the Workers’

International Industrial Union. The IWW was a justified, but fundamentally flawed, reaction against the chauvinism and pro-capitalist strikebreaking activities of the AFL. The IWW was the first non-segregated trade union in the United States, breaking with the either *de facto* or *de jure* racially segregationist, anti-immigrant, and generally chauvinistic unionism that predominated the AFL and Knights of Labor.

Debs, in his address at the founding convention in 1905, said, “There are those who believe that this form of unionism [the AFL] can be changed from within. They are very greatly mistaken. We might as well have remained in the Republican and Democratic parties and have expected to effect certain changes from within, instead of withdrawing from those parties and organizing a party that represented the exploiting working class.” The IWW thus represented a break with the reformist conception of “pushing the unions left”. However, the organization would be repeatedly criticized by Lenin for essentially trying to dodge conflict with the old conservative unions. (See *Left-Wing Communism*

—“*Should Revolutionaries Work in Reactionary Trade Unions?*”) The IWW, which was initially considered eligible for affiliation to the Third International, was dogged from the start by two wrong ideas. The first was syndicalism, namely, that economic organization of the workers is the only or the decisive force in eliminating capitalist exploitation. The leading role of the Communist Party, which represents the proletariat and gathers all the exploited and oppressed people around the proletariat (including the non-proletarian trade union masses), and the necessity of establishing the dictatorship of the proletariat and forcibly suppressing all class enemies, was denied by the Wobblies. The second was the tactical problems Lenin criticized as infantile, namely, the IWW’s refusal to “resort to various stratagems, artifices and illegal methods, to evasions and subterfuges, as long as we get into the [reactionary] trade unions, remain in them, and carry on communist work within them at all costs” (*Left-Wing Communism*). In the

eyes of the IWW, all that was needed was a revolutionary alternative to the AFL. Theoretically, workers would steadily join it and the AFL would steadily decline, until the

IWW reached a critical mass capable of overthrowing capitalism. Thus, while the IWW was born out of a correct desire to break with the class collaborationist sellouts of the AFL and the Knights, the IWW was severely limited by its political outlook and its dual-unionism. (Although for the opposite reason that the revisionists allege—in their eyes the issue was that there was a break with the AFL at all, not that the IWW was content coexisting with the AFL instead of combining independent unionism with fractional work within the AFL.) In this way, the desire to unite the international working-class was hindered by erroneous tactics that appeal mainly to the petty-bourgeoisie.

It was in this era that “unity” became the catchphrase of the worst traitors and splitters of organized labor and the labor aristocracy took a greater and greater role in the leadership of the establishment labor movement. Kautsky, in justifying the massacre of revolutionary proletarians in Germany, hypocritically claimed, “There are no class antagonisms within the proletariat... an inferior tactic which maintains unity achieves more than a superior one which sacrifices it” (*Revolution and Counterrevolution in Germany*). Lenin, on the other hand, correctly ridiculed the “theorists” of the Second International accordingly:

“Kautsky is encouraging this corruption; *he sanctifies this international split among the militant proletarians in the name of unity with the opportunists of their ‘own’ nations, with the Südekums!* And yet there are people who fail to understand that the unity slogan of the old parties means the ‘unity’ of the proletariat of a given nation with the bourgeoisie of that nation, and a split among the proletariat of the various nations.”

And concerning the trade union movement specifically,

Lenin said:

“People are so degraded and stultified by bourgeois legality that they cannot even conceive of the need for organizations of another kind, illegal organizations, for the purpose of guiding the revolutionary struggle. So low have people fallen that they imagine that legal unions existing with the permission of the police are a kind of ultima Thule—as though the preservation of such unions as leading bodies is at all conceivable at a time of crisis! Here you have the living dialectic of opportunism: *the mere growth of legal unions and the mere habit that stupid but conscientious philistines have of confining themselves to bookkeeping, have created a situation in which, during a crisis, these conscientious philistines have proved to be traitors and betrayers*, who would smother the revolutionary energy of the masses. This is no chance occurrence. The building of a revolutionary organization must be begun—that is demanded by the new historical situation, by the epoch of proletarian revolutionary action—but it can be begun only over the heads of the old leaders, the stranglers of revolutionary energy, over the heads of the old party, through its destruction.” [*Collapse of the Second International*]

The establishment trade union leaders were therefore exposed by circumstance as bean-counters employed by the bourgeoisie, whose “organizing” was in fact completely devoid of substance. It is theoretically incorrect to accept the leadership of organizations simply because they exist with the permission of the police, and it is downright reactionary to advocate that the workers follow these organizations through crises which they are legally and objectively not capable of responding to.

Imperialism and the Split in Socialism (written by Lenin in 1916, and a partial catalog of Marx and Engels’ statements on opportunism in the British trade unions) thoroughly

explained the political- economic laws behind the degeneration of the trade union and party bureaucrats in this period, and Stalin aptly summed up the failure of the official parties to lead the trade union movement: “The parties of the Second International, which preach ‘khvostism,’ are vehicles of bourgeois policy, which condemns the proletariat to the role of a tool in the hands of the bourgeoisie. Only a party which adopts the standpoint of the advanced detachment of the proletariat and is able to raise the masses to the level of understanding the class interest of the proletariat—only such a party can divert the working class from the path of trade unionism and convert it into an independent political force”(*Foundations of Leninism*). This is an important concept because even at this time, the path of the spontaneous trade union struggle was clearly diverging from “bread and butter” issues as the bourgeoisie got better at controlling the trade union movement. “The path of trade unionism” in Stalin’s time meant potentially being “a tool in the hands of the bourgeoisie”. “The path of trade unionism” today means the path of the state unions, it means the path of *abandoning the most basic interests of the wage workers*. Thus the question of the seizure of political power, and of the Communist Party which leads that struggle, becomes *more* important for the trade union movement as the bourgeoisie exerts *greater pressure to divert the movement from the interests of the trade union masses*, both the issue of state power and the “pure and simple” issues of wages and hours which actually represent the rate of profit.

It would be wrong to say because of the similarity of their ideas (political independence of the trade unions, economic gains for the workers, “unity” with opportunism) that Gompers was a Kautsky-style Second Internationalist. Rather, it was the Second Internationalists who were shown during World War I to be no better than Gompers, who was a strong proponent of American entry into the war and claimed, “The defeat of the Prussian Military Government [by Wilson] would give the workmen of Germany an opportunity to establish a democratic government.”¹⁰⁷ For all

his talk of rejecting politics and organizing “pure and simple” trade unions, Gompers showed himself to be little more than a lackey for the Wilson administration in its drive to establish America as the foremost imperialist power, and for all their talk of socialism and revolution, the Second Internationalists showed themselves to be little more than petty-bourgeois agents seeking crumbs from their respective governments. The development of these two trends reached their apex in the first world war, when the reactionary trade unionists and the parties of the Second International “united” behind the imperialist war drive, proving unambiguously that the “non-partisan” trade unionists and the “Economist” socialists were lackeys of the bourgeoisie in the trade union movement.

Even though the leaders completely deserted the masses during the war, major conflicts between organized labor and capital rocked America in this period. The Anthracite Coal Strike in 1902 (which led to the creation of the first state police organization in the US in 1905), the Colorado Labor Wars of 1903-4, the Chicago Garment Workers' Strike in 1910, the Seattle General Strike of 1919 and the strike wave that year (including the Boston police strike which led to the complete reorganization of city police), and the Big Coal Strike in 1922 were massive upheavals that once again made the labor question the order of the day.

It was because of all of these facts—the treachery of the leaders, the rebelliousness of the masses, the demand for imperialist expansion brought on by a war for redivision of the world—that the labor movement as we now know it started to take shape, as well as many of the government law enforcement bodies responsible for doing the dirty work of the bourgeoisie, which had formerly been a private mercenary affair. (For instance, the notorious Pinkerton National Detective Agency was employed to attack strikers and investigate trade union organizers for years, but were functionally replaced by local and state law enforcement.) A national organ for arbitrating labor disputes was created in

the War Labor Board, the prototype of the modern National Labor Relations Board. At the same time, old issues in the labor movement persisted, especially the chauvinist attitude towards the oppressed nations, national and ethnic minorities and migrant workers, which the AFL continued in spite of the collapse of the Knights of Labor. The AFL minted a pamphlet titled “Some Reasons for Chinese Exclusion” also known as “American Manhood Against Asiatic Coolieism”^{[9]108} and notoriously embraced Jim Crow by segregating certain trades, essentially barring non-white workers from organizing. Thus, while the practical weakness of the Knights of Labor had been temporarily overcome by Gompers, the same backwards politics continued to rule the trade union movement in this era and set the stage for the extreme decline of the 20s. It was the split from the Second International and the guidance of the Third International exercised through the Communist Party which would drive the trade union movement in the United States forward in the next period.

End Notes

Three

THE MODERN TRADE UNION MOVEMENT AND THE THIRD INTERNATIONAL

Towards the end of the 1920s, the trade union movement in the US had utterly stagnated. In 1927, William Foster described the trade union movement accordingly:

“The organized workers of this country constitute the only important labor movement in the world which still frankly supports and defends the capitalist system. [...] In line with this unparalleled ideological backwardness, the American labor movement is the only important one which still remains affiliated to the capitalist political parties, and which has not yet built up a mass political party of its own. On the other hand, the workers of Great Britain, Germany, France (not to mention those of the Soviet Union) have long since broken with the capitalist parties and have organized their Labor, Socialist, and Communist parties. [...] The trade unions proper, in their organization and policies, reflect the same general backwardness of the American working class. Although confronted with a very rapid concentration of the forces of capital their leaders still cling desperately to the antiquated system of craft unionism. European workers, who have a much less powerful capitalism to contend with, have long since adopted generally the principle of industrial rather than craft organization and they are constantly consolidating their unions. Numerically the American unions are also relatively weaker than those of any other of the great industrial countries. They comprise (including independent unions) only 3,500,000 of a total of at least 20,000,000 organizable workers. And those who are organized are mostly skilled workers and others engaged in the competitive and lighter industries. The great basic and trustified industries, which in Europe are heavily organized, here remain largely without trade unions. [...] For many years the employers have

followed with success the policy of making concessions to skilled workers, to split them away from the unskilled and to make them docile. [...] The employers also develop welfare systems, employee stock-holding, company unions, profit sharing schemes, etc. with which they seek to weaken the resistance of the working class generally. American imperialism, with its ‘boom’ conditions, also creates new industries, which enables considerable numbers of the highest paid workers to pass into the ranks of the small business elements. [...] These forces develop an ultra conservative trade union bureaucracy which in turn becomes a further vital factor in blocking the progress of the American labor movement. The incredibly reactionary bureaucracy now standing at the head of our unions, itself the product of the conservatizing, ‘bribing’ effects of American capitalism has in turn, under the stimulus of the employers, become a very powerful cause in retarding the struggles of the workers for enlightenment, for a strong organization, and for higher standards of living. Far more than is commonly supposed, even by left wing theoreticians, the trade union leaders, who for many years have bitterly fought every progressive movement in the unions, are responsible for the present severe plight of the labor movement.” [Preface to *Misleaders of Labor*]

It is worth dwelling on this description—written almost a full century ago—because it is these facts which determined the ideological struggles within the labor movement and among communists at the time, and which continue to bedevil labor organizers in the present day.

Internationally, the trade union movement at the time was not much better. Stalin described the reactionary role of the Amsterdam international (recall that the AFL was an affiliate) thus:

“Still more difficult and peculiar are the conditions

under which the trade unions are developing in the West. Firstly, they are narrow owing to their 'tried' craft-union practice and are hostile to socialism, for, having arisen before the Socialist parties, and having developed without the aid of the latter, they are accustomed to plume themselves on their 'independence,' they place craft interests above class interests, and refuse to recognize anything beyond 'a penny a day' increase in wages. Secondly, they are conservative in spirit and hostile to all revolutionary undertakings, for they are led by the old, venal trade union bureaucracy, which is being fed by the bourgeoisie and is always ready to place the trade unions at the service of imperialism. Lastly, these trade unions, united around the Amsterdam reformists, constitute that vast army of reformism which serves as a prop for the present-day capitalist system. [...] The bourgeoisie cannot be overthrown unless it is deprived of its prop in the shape of the reactionary Amsterdam federation; the dictatorship cannot be achieved unless that bourgeois citadel in Amsterdam is won to the side of the revolution. That, however, cannot be done by one-sided action from outside. That aim can be achieved at the present time only by combined work inside and outside for obtaining trade union unity. That is why the question of trade union unity and of entering international industrial federations is becoming an urgent one. Of course, the Lefts must be supported and pushed forward. But real support can be rendered the Lefts only if the banner of the revolutionary unions is kept unfurled, if the reactionary Amsterdam leaders are scourged for their treachery and splitting tactics, if the Left leaders are criticized for their half-heartedness and irresolution in the struggle against the reactionary leaders. Only such a policy can prepare the ground for real trade union unity." [*Concerning the International Situation*]

According to Stalin, the Amsterdam unions were tools for

misleading the workers: consequently, actual proletarian unity must be based in a rejection of the reactionary leadership, politics, and practices of these unions. Whether the reactionary leaders could be overthrown from within their organizations, or overcome by simply bringing the workers into new organizations, was a tactical question that needed to be answered on a case-by-case basis, dependent on the loyalty of the workers to the reactionary leaders, the concrete organizational situation in the trade union, and the existence (or not) of a revolutionary alternative. This contradiction—between the revolutionary attitude of the trade union masses who were rising up against fascism and the Great Depression on one hand and the reactionary scheming of the trade union leaders on the other—created a split in the establishment American trade unions after the AFL expelled a number of unions that supported the Committee for Industrial Organization, a policy group in the AFL that wanted to orient towards organizing large masses of unskilled workers. These unions became the Congress of Industrial Organizations, which in turn benefited from the support of the Communist Party USA. Also important to note is that both the First and Second Internationals had their own trade union detachments, and the Third International had the “Profintern,” a trade union international that organized the trade union struggle across national boundaries. The rapid expansion of the trade union movement in the US and communist leadership within it benefited enormously from the prestige and practical intervention of the Profintern and related organizations.

Both the trade unions and the CPUSA benefited from the upsurge of the masses in this period. The sit-down strikes of the CIO-affiliated United Auto Workers, the victory of the Steel Workers Organizing Committee (which later became the USW), the 1926 Passaic Textile Strike, the 1934 West Coast Longshoreman’s Strike, the Uprising of 1934 in the textile industry, and the Minneapolis general strike in 1934 (sold out by Trotskyist leadership in the Teamsters with the military assistance of then- governor Floyd Olson) as well as

the post-WW2 strike wave showed that American workers were prepared to organize and fight under conditions of global economic crisis, strengthening fascism, and fierce repression from rapidly-expanding American imperialism. The extremely dire situation of the masses in this period led to the expansion of strike activity and trade union organization.

The Communist Party USA at that time tried to capitalize on this upsurge, first through the Trade Union Educational League (1921 to 1929) and subsequently through the Trade Union Unity League (1929 to 1935). Both of these organizations were led by William Foster, who would later become a notorious Khrushchevite. (See “Browder Tries Again to Destroy the Communist Party”, a 1960 article in which Foster *defends* Khrushchev from Browder’s correct claim that Khrushchev was being praised for the same ideas Browder was criticized for two decades earlier.) Foster’s thinking was characterized by centrism, in both the trade union movement and the Communist Party. Foster was opposed to the AFL at times— even repeatedly referring to AFL bureaucrats as fascists in many writings—but he was also opposed to dual-unionism and secessionism, which he claimed “is a malignant disease that sickens and devitalizes the whole labor movement” (*Bankruptcy of the American Labor Movement*, Chapter 3). Foster was opposed to the Lovestoneite faction that was wrecking the CPUSA, but he was also opposed to the discipline of the Comintern, whose 10th condition for affiliation demanded parties “expound as forcefully as possible among trades unionists the idea of the necessity of the break with the yellow Amsterdam International. It must support the International Association of Red Trades Unions affiliated to the Communist International, at present in the process of formation, with every means at its disposal.” Thus the trade union “league” model was Foster’s way of reconciling the demands of the Comintern, which required a formal and complete break with the reactionary trade unions, and the demands of the reactionaries in the trade union movement. In 1929, Stalin

criticized Foster directly, declaring, “*An end must be put to the present situation in the Communist Party of America*, in which the questions of positive work, the questions of the struggle of the working class against the capitalists, questions of wages, working hours, *work in the trade unions*, the fight against reformism, the fight against the Right deviation—*when all these questions are kept in the shade, and are replaced by petty questions of the factional struggle between the Lovestone group and the Foster group*” (“Speech Delivered in the American Commission of the Presidium of the ECCI, May 6, 1929”, emphasis added).” Stalin subsequently noted of Foster that, “He behaved first and foremost as a factionalist.

Because in the factional fight against the Lovestone group even concealed Trotskyites might be useful to him.” [“First Speech Delivered in the Presidium of the ECCI. on the American Question, May 14th, 1929”] And what were the Trotskyists doing in the trade union movement at that period? Their program was summed up by James Cannon as simply: “This movement of the masses into the trade unions can be seriously influenced only from within. From this it follows: Get into the unions. Stay there. Work within” (*The AFL, the Strike Wave, and Trade Union Perspectives*).” Thus the present state of collaboration between the revisionists and the Trotskyists in the state unions is merely the logical continuation of the old policies, which hinged on working within (or “boring from within”) the existing unions, against the correct line of Stalin, who said the best way to strengthen the left opposition within the existing unions was from the outside, in the creation and expansion of new unions that uphold the left line.

Foster and the rightist leadership of the CPUSA had been forced by a combination of external pressure from Stalin and the Comintern during the Third Period, and internal pressure from rank-and-file class-conscious organizers who rejected the failure of the boring-from-within model, into creating their own alternative class-conscious, independent

and combative trade union center. Called the Trade Union Unity League (TUUL), it was the first organization since the IWW to fully embrace industrial unionism and reject the old practice of narrow craft unionism, segregationist unionism, nativism, misogyny, etc. As detailed in various past articles by New Labor Press, the TUUL broke new theoretical and practical ground in sectors and areas throughout the US, representing the closest our country has had to a correct class conscious union center in its history. As it began to face increased repression from all sides, rather than weather the storm and consolidate their organization during this period of repression, as the Third Period passed to the Popular Front period, the revisionist Fosterite and Browderite leadership (who had never wanted to create the TUUL to begin with) unceremoniously dissolved the TUUL and shoved its workers and organizers back into the AFL. This new mass of politically aimless class-conscious trade union organizers within the AFL, combined with the conditions of the Great Depression, set the stage for the rapid growth of a new 'politically neutral' industrial unionist current which took the form of the CIO.

While this period saw the historically largest growth in the trade union movement and the organizations created during this period are still the main trade union organizations in the US, it would be wrong to claim the CIO was a principled proletarian-led trade union and that the Communist Party took a principled stance in support of it. In fact, the unprincipled split that created the CIO (expulsion from the AFL by the petty bourgeois-minded bureaucracy) and the opportunist logic of the Communist Party USA in supporting it (i.e. support of the Gompers type, of rewarding friends instead of organizing for proletarian revolution) were the seeds for the betrayal of both organizations, the CIO in reaffiliating to the AFL and the CPUSA in tailing the New Deal and eventually liquidating the party altogether.

The first president of the CIO, John Lewis, had been a leader in the AFL and supported Coolidge and Hoover; the seven

other union leaders in the Committee for Industrial Organization were also all AFL bureaucrats.¹⁰⁹ At the AFL convention in 1935, Lewis appealed to the AFL bureaucrats to change their policy for petty bourgeois reasons: “Heed this cry from Macedonia that comes from the hearts of men. Organize the unorganized, and in so doing you make the American Federation of Labor the greatest instrumentality that has ever been forged in the history of modern civilization to befriend the cause of humanity and champion human rights.” John Lewis wanted the AFL leadership to abandon its self-destructive policy of ignoring the unorganized masses and maintaining craft divisions among the organized workers. That is what led to the creation of the CIO as a committee within the AFL. It was the extreme narrow-mindedness of the bourgeois leadership of the AFL, and not principled trade-unionism by Lewis and company, that led to the independent CIO.

As for the opportunism of the CPUSA in the trade union movement, it is worth noting Foster’s correct claim in 1927 that, “The bureaucrats are compromising the unions on all fronts, ideological and organizational” (*Misleaders of Labor*, pg 95). And more specifically, “Lewis has betrayed the miners flagrantly in every district in the country in his eagerness to do the bidding of the operators” (Foster, “Company Unionism and Trade Unionism”, 1926). Yet it was these same bureaucrats who founded the CIO less than a decade later. In fact, as late as 1936, then-Chairman Foster and then-General Secretary Browder authored a pamphlet titled, “For a Powerful, United A. F. of L.” arguing *against* the CIO split and *for* the AFL, with the minor caveat that the AFL should drop its craft divisions and actually work to bring in unorganized unskilled and semi-skilled workers. The AFL was criticized in this pamphlet on the reactionary grounds that the AFL’s policy “keeps tens of millions of workers out of the A. F. of L.” The struggle against the AFL leadership, while historically progressive, had been waged on fundamentally unprincipled grounds. At every step, the CPUSA castigated the reactionaries in the trade union movement for their

practical uselessness (“organize the unorganized” is a common criticism across CPUSA publications and was even the title of a 1923 article from Foster about the reactionary trade union leadership who are described as “official disorganizers”)¹¹⁰ while organizationally uniting with them. The clearest expression of this line came from arch-revisionist Browder, whose article “Arise Ye Cheated Bureaucrats” is literally a call for the foot-soldiers of the reactionary bureaucrats to overthrow their leaders. Browder said, “Consider the pitiful reality. Because the trade union leadership has lacked the good sense to organize a labor party it has robbed itself of all these rich political plums. [...] The unions have been practically wiped out on many systems, and a hundred times as many officials lost their jobs as would have done so through amalgamation. [Amalgamation was the policy advocated by Communists at the time for consolidating the trade unions.] [...] Think of the thousands upon thousands of good trade union official jobs that would be at its disposal were the great industries organized. But Gompersism, with all the sterility and incompetence which that implies, has kept them disorganized. What a loss for potential office holders! Only a few have been able to get the gravy.”¹¹¹ This is how the correct line of Stalin was distorted at the time: the reactionary trade union leaders must be criticized. But is this criticism to be carried out on bourgeois grounds, according to the logic of factionalism or technical weaknesses in their organizational methods, or according to the fundamental interests of the proletariat? Considered from the standpoint of the dictatorship of the proletariat, neither the CIO or the AFL could be considered viable tools for organizing socialist production, and the CPUSA’s activity within these organizations was not aimed at transforming them into organs of proletarian dictatorship. In fact, this was the period that saw major expansion in the state’s intervention in the trade unions, with the creation of the National Labor Board in 1933, the National Labor Relations Act of 1935 (aka the Wagner Act), and the National War Labor Board established in 1942.

The acceptance of these bodies by the trade union bureaucrats should have prompted serious criticism from the CPUSA, but instead they were accepted as concessions from the liberals as part of a supposed Popular Front.

The most important criticism of the CPUSA's failure to lead the trade union movement in this period came from Harrison George, who was expelled by the Browderites:

“Only the appearance of struggle is given by magnifying the significance of secondary struggles and the maneuvering of our own Party’s participation in such struggles, including factional struggles among bourgeois political machines, and the factional struggles arising among trade-union bureaucrats and petty-bourgeois liberals who make personally profitable careers by political trading with these major factions, Democrat and Republican, within the camp of the imperialist bourgeoisie. All this lends our Party work the appearance of ‘activity.’ We have ‘activity,’ no end, in the factional struggle within the Democratic Party. We have ‘activity’ in the trade-union movement, but there, too, factionally, in favor of the CIO leadership as against the AFL leadership—forgetting the rank and file of both, as also our words about trade-union unity.”
[*The Crisis in the CPUSA*, emphasis added]

In the trade union movement, the slogan of “organizing the unorganized” was used by the Communists to conceal tailing the reactionary trade union bureaucrats, who were either not opposed at all or were opposed for factional reasons, and not because they were fundamentally hostile to the class interests of the proletariat. The impact of this opportunism was the complete negation of the struggle against the AFL—the CIO formally reunited with the AFL in 1955 as both fully accepted the NLRB framework for the trade union movement—and the liquidation of the Communist Party as the vanguard party of the proletariat, as the CP tailed the trade union bureaucrats who accepted the Democratic Party’s policy of

purging communists from trade union leadership. The AFL unions had formerly been criticized by the Communist Party for “company unionizing”—yet it was the CP that stood by while the AFL-CIO state-unionized in the wake of the Wagner and Taft-Hartley Acts.

The most important features of the labor movement in this era were the existence of a Communist Party guided in part by the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, the rapid political swing to the left of the masses during the Third Period which manifested in new red labor organizations like the Trade Union Unity League, and their intervention in the trade union struggle, and reciprocal action by the Communist Party and the trade unions, both principled (for instance, the struggle against Trotskyism and fascism) and unprincipled, followed by a similarly rapid swing back to the right under Browder’s revisionist “Americanist Communism” line in the Popular Front Era. This period was undeniably the peak of communism in the US (the American proletariat has not reconstituted its party in 80 years) as well as the trade union movement. On the basis of the infrastructure and organizers forged during the TUUL period, the CIO’s industrial unionism swelled union membership. Union density in the United States peaked in 1945 with approximately one-third of workers being union members.¹¹² However, these Browderite-era organizations were fundamentally politically unsound. The colossal growth in trade union membership in this period was the prelude to even more colossal betrayals by the trade union leadership over the next few decades. Without a Communist Party—which was formally liquidated in 1944 but practically liquidated as the organized advanced detachment of the proletariat even earlier—the trade union masses were completely disarmed going into the wildcat battles of the 60s and 70s and the prolonged crisis of organized labor in the subsequent decades.

End Notes

Conclusion

THE CONTEMPORARY TRADE UNION MOVEMENT AND THE STRUGGLE FOR THE PARTY

In 1955, the CIO and AFL merged into the AFL-CIO, a plan which was praised by Foster on the grounds that, “The 20-year war between the two federations appears to be ending... It can provide the workers with a weapon of immense power.”¹¹³ The fact that the merger plan was explicitly aimed at defeating “the challenge of Soviet Communist totalitarianism” and formally excluded communists were secondary issues for Foster and the rest of the revisionist CPUSA. Thus, any semblance of organized class-conscious unionism met its end, supposedly ushering in a golden age of trade union unity and immense power for organized labor, at the minor cost of Communist leadership.

However, Foster was not ringing in the golden age of organized labor in America as he believed, but in fact sounding its death knell. The peak of union density achieved in the 40s would only get further and further away until it reached its present abysmal low of about ten percent. (See “Political Economy of the American Labor Movement”.) The revisionist CPUSA, whose Browderite leaders staged a phony reconstitution process after WW2, limped along for the rest of the Cold War until funding from the revisionist CPSU ceased during the collapse of the Soviet Union. (The collapse of the Soviet Union caused a split in the CPUSA between a continuator faction, which exists today as a couple thousand supporters of the Democratic Party and union bureaucrats under the name CPUSA, and the Committees of Correspondence which included prominent CPUSA members who were open liquidators.)

The trade union movement in the present era is characterized by three important facts: the impossibility of organizing economic action (much less political action) through relying on official channels (which has given rise to the existence of wildcat strikes and the objective need for

independent unionism); the institutionalized opportunism of the state union leaders; and the incorporation of the establishment trade unions into the bourgeois state apparatus. The number of major work stoppages (meaning over one thousand workers participated) plummeted from 424 in 1974 to 62 in 1984 and continued declining from there.¹¹⁴ The state union leaders oversaw the virtual collapse of trade union organization in the United States and have a historic record of imposing sellouts even in times of favorable labor market conditions, abysmal working conditions, and mass enthusiasm for struggle. (The best recent example is 2020, when millions of Americans protested against police violence, millions of trade union members were kept on the job through the COVID crisis with no hazard pay or safety measures, and when votes for strikes easily passed 90% support among the trade union masses—all this energy was converted into speedups and layoffs for the trade union masses.) The trade unions are formally tied to the bourgeoisie through the NLRB framework, which is uncritically accepted by virtually the entire trade union movement, with the main demand of many trade union bureaucrats being the PRO Act, and in case formal state control was not enough, virtually all trade union bureaucrats are firmly committed Democrats or Republicans.

However, it is not true that there have been no spontaneous uprisings against the status quo in the trade union movement since the establishment of the current labor management system. A number of important battles have taken place in the trade union movement since the betrayal of the CPUSA and the consolidation of opportunism in the trade union movement represented by the AFL-CIO merger.

The largest wildcat strike in US history took place in 1970 among United States Postal Service workers. Other logistics workers sporadically undertook wildcat strikes in the 1970s, such as at the United Parcel Service. The Fraternal Association of Steel Haulers split from the Teamsters and tried to organize a national strike in 1978 against the scab

IBT.¹¹⁵ The Greensboro Massacre in 1979 resulted in the death of five Communist Workers' Party members, all of which had been active in the trade union movement. The 1981 PATCO strike was a sign that the era of concessions to the trade union bureaucracy had ended. The PATCO union endorsed Reagan in 1980 then when thousands of air traffic controllers went on strike in 1981, Reagan broke the strike, the non-scab employees (the vast majority) were fired and the union was decertified by the Federal Labor Relations Authority. PATCO was a warning to the trade union bureaucrats that they could either fully state-unionize or face liquidation, and they have unanimously decided on the former. Since then, the 1997 UPS strike, the GM strikes in the late 90s, and the 2018-2019 education strikes are the most significant labor actions in terms of people mobilized and economic impact. These were all sabotaged by the union leadership, which is terrified of being PATCO'd, and equally terrified of breaking with the bourgeoisie, which it is fully dependent on for revenue. This contradiction has created a situation where the trade union masses consistently support strike action, and are willing to make colossal sacrifices for their trade union rights, yet they are kept in a state of perpetual retreat by the state union leaders.

Such is the picture of the trade union movement in the present day. The struggle to reconstitute the Communist Party in our country is also highly backwards. The struggle to reconstitute the Communist Party, and by extension elevate the trade union movement, has been repeatedly sabotaged by the petty bourgeoisie, who are comfortable with the present state of affairs. A number of ideas have been trotted out to justify the current state of affairs, from touting "boring from within" as a viable (if not universal) strategy for communists to lead the trade union movement, to the Gauche Proletarienne theory of rejecting trade unions altogether. The Revolutionary Communist Party, the largest national Maoist organization during the New Communist Movement, was formed out of Students for a Democratic Society and carried over the political baggage of that movement into the struggle

for the party. (See the Port Huron Statement, essentially the program of SDS written with the assistance of arch-opportunist and UAW bureaucrat Walther Reuther—it is blatantly anticommunist and written from the standpoint of labor liberalism.) The RCP was revisionist in the trend of class collaborationism via the labor bureaucrats (see “False Theories False Leaders: MCU in the Labor Movement”—also see the RCP article “The October League (M-L): A Cover for Revisionism” in which the RCP admits the difference between the RCP and OL(M-L) line in the trade unions is “critical support” for reformist slates versus uncritical support)¹¹⁶ while a number of other NCM groups outright rejected the trade unions or certain aspects of their work for un-Marxist reasons. (For instance, the Sojourner Truth Organization rejected the concept of a trade union contract altogether in “Mass Organization at the Workplace” written in 1972.) On the international scale, the Revolutionary Internationalist Movement (which included the RCP, as well as the Peruvian, Turkish, and Indian Communists) was not able to organize an equivalent to the Profintern and eventually collapsed under the combined blows of the setbacks in Peru and the victory of revisionism in America (led by Avakian) and Nepal (led by Prachanda). Thus, not only did the American proletariat never reconstitute its Communist Party and consequently never asserted leadership in the trade union movement, but the American trade unionists never benefited from an alternative leadership on the international stage in the contemporary post-Comintern era.

In fact, the international trade union movement is no better off than the American trade union movement. In 2006, the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (an American imperialist front) and the World Confederation of Labor merged into the International Trade Union Conference. The ITUC and the revisionist World Federation of Trade Unions are the two main international trade union centers today, although their combined political influence is negligible. Losovsky, in *The World's Trade Union*

Movement, pointed out that, “The tactics of the Amsterdam International, that is, the prevalence of the craft over the class, the prevalence of national over international interests, brings about the defeat of the separate parts of this International in the struggle against perfectly organized capital... If not in principle, at least in practice, for this International based on national organizations every one of which defends the interests of its bourgeois state, such an International naturally is unable to fight.”¹¹⁷ Today, the existence of “international” unions in every industry and trade union centers in every country “uniting” millions of workers has been shown to be utterly pointless so long as they are subordinated to the class interests of the bourgeoisie. The slogans of “unity” and “organize the unorganized” have been turned into their opposite by the bourgeoisie and become a cover for “organizing” the defeat of the workers by bringing them into trade unions which surrender on every relevant question for the trade union masses. An international red labor organization, if one is to be organized in the near future, must study the particular methods of repressing and bribing trade union organizers in their respective countries and base its organization on struggle for communist leadership in the trade union movement and against anti-union ideas in the international communist movement.

The Leninist idea that the trade unions and the proletarian party advance via “reciprocal action” and the Maoist idea of concentric construction must be creatively applied in each country. The United States is the perfect example of how the repeated failures of the communists strengthened the dominance of opportunism in the trade union movement and reduced both the communists and the trade unions to a non-issue for the bourgeoisie.

The communists in the United States should be organizing against the spontaneous capitulation to the state unions in the trade union movement. It is a fact that there is no reconstituted Communist Party in the United States

organizing against this tendency and providing a viable alternative leadership to the trade union masses. Looking back at the development of the labor movement, it seems self-evident that the trade unions rapidly deteriorate under the influence of the petty bourgeoisie, represented by the dominance of revisionism. Yet the struggle for the Communist Party and for class-conscious trade unions is continually undermined by the same revisionist theories that reduce communist leadership to formally conquering positions in the bureaucracy, deny the existence of a political line in all trade unions or refuse to criticize erroneous ones, or deny the significance of the trade unions in overthrowing the bourgeoisie and organizing a new state and socialist economy. The struggle to reconstitute the Communist Party and the trade union struggle in the United States both hinge on a complete break with revisionism, which can only be effected through the correct application of Maoist theory in the US.

Endnotes

HIGHLIGHTS FROM LINE STRUGGLE IN THE TRADE UNION MOVEMENT

**New Labor Press
2023-2024**

COMMENTARY

This is a compilation taken from multiple articles published by New Labor Press refuting some of the major mistaken ideas concerning Maoist leadership in the labor movement. The culmination of the line struggle so far was the formation of the New Labor Organizing Committee for uniting the various labor organizations that formed based on the line of the New Labor Press. (Although technically organizations like SNELC and New Day at UPS predated the New Labor Press.) It is worth examining in detail the various excuses concocted in order to avoid breaking with the bourgeoisie and its agents in the labor movement.

Concurrent with the resistance to breaking with state unionism is the resistance to party discipline. For instance, Red Star Communist Organization criticized the New Labor Press on the grounds that party-building was central. But they argued in the same article that it was not possible to organize a national party, only “build mass work where we are.” The Maoist Communist Union was even more shameless, openly claiming in polemics that communists should not be trying to remove the reactionaries from trade union leadership, but only “popularize Marxism”. *The Worker* (aka the Daltonite revisionists trying to continue Tribune of the People under a new name) similarly took up a clericalist anti-Party line, demanding “ideological unity” in the abstract in opposition to unity among US revolutionaries based on both the theory *and* the practice of Maoism, in this case the concrete application of Maoism to the labor movement through a class line (as done by the New Labor organizations).

It scarcely needs explaining that these highlights are specific to a certain stage of the development of Maoism in the US—

the pre-reconstituted Party era—and by no means can these excerpts be taken as a conclusion to the line struggle. On the contrary, line struggle can only become more acute as the proletariat comes nearer to taking over leadership in the trade union movement. It will be the masses who are the decisive factor in destroying the state unionist line and the various revisionist organizations that promote it in the US.

HIGHLIGHTS FROM LINE STRUGGLE IN THE TRADE UNION MOVEMENT

In the course of the first couple years of the New Labor Press and the labor organizations implementing its line, a number of mistaken ideas have been trotted out under the banner of Maoism to fight against the correct line of the NLP. These ideas—many of which are dogmas passed down from previous generations of revisionists—were refuted in the course of multiple polemics from the NLP and shown in practice to be wrong by Maoists organizing on the shop floor. Due to the basis for opportunism in the American labor movement in the vast riches of the state unions, there is no doubt these ideas will continue to be a hindrance to labor organizers for years to come. It is therefore worth summarizing these ideas and why they are wrong.

One such error, and probably the easiest one for the lay-organizer to commit, is metaphysics. The metaphysical outlook simply takes for granted the eternal and unchanging nature of the trade unions, which is completely contrary to the reality of the trade unions, which are constantly being destroyed and reborn in accordance with the development of industry and the class struggle. The metaphysical outlook simply does not take into account the class struggle within the trade union movement, the evolving forms that the struggle takes, or the necessary preparations for qualitative leaps in trade union organization when the class struggle becomes particularly acute. What exists—that is, the state unions—is simply assumed to eternally express the interests of the trade union masses. Or the trade union form itself is viewed as static, seemingly without class characteristics or historic variations in use.

This error was exemplified by Saoirse of the Revolutionary Maoist Coalition, who wrote: “4. Given that a) the Communist movement is the movement of the proletariat, b) unions are the most basic organization of the proletariat, c) unions alone cannot liberate the proletariat, we understand

that there must be thorough, consistent, and deliberate participation of Communists in the labor movement for the express purpose of transforming trade-union consciousness into Communist consciousness, and growing the Communist movement. 5. The growth and development of the unions and the union movement itself is not the goal of Communist activity in organized labor, but merely a by-product of the actual goal of building the Communist movement and developing Communist consciousness among the working class.” [*Some Preliminary Theses on Communist Work in the Trade Unions*]

It is worth noting that there is a contradiction in the metaphysics here. Unions are both “the most basic organization of the proletariat” which contribute to “liberating the proletariat” (albeit not alone) yet are also “merely a by-product of the actual goal of building the Communist movement”, i.e. a reform unrelated to the “actual” work of revolutionaries. The best weapon for fighting metaphysics is dialectical materialism, which requires a concrete analysis of a concrete situation. In opposition to the metaphysical theory of trade unions as “basic organizations of the proletariat” (a misunderstanding of Lenin’s point regarding the primitiveness of trade unions), the NLP succinctly pointed out that:

“Contrary to what Comrade Saoirse writes, the reality readily apparent to almost anyone that has worked in the nation’s factories, construction sites, warehouses, and workplaces of the ‘hardcore’ proletariat is that the industrial proletariat in the United States is legally represented by some of the most corrupt, most apathetic, and most reactionary ‘unions’ in the entire country. In fact, the reality is that most of the strongest ‘unions’ in the US are actually located among the middle classes, the petty bourgeoisie, in particular among cops, teachers, nurses, and employees of the state and national bureaucratic apparatuses. The state unions which organize the working class, whether it be

in the industrial, agricultural, extractive, service, logistics, or educational and medical sectors are structurally rotten to an extent even the petty bourgeois unions are not. Many are indeed powerful, but in a reactionary bourgeois sense. Their leaders and agents make back-door deals with organized crime, owners, and management, their enforcers physically threaten and attack those that challenge their leadership, they actively sabotage worker militancy not controlled and orchestrated by them, their contracts explicitly reward complacency and class collaboration, and the gap between their college-educated organizing staff and internal bureaucracy and the workers they are supposed to represent is enormous.” [*Critical Remarks on Some Preliminary Theses on Communist Work in the Trade Unions*]

And elsewhere,

“The first point in Comrade Saoirse’s list has the same fundamental problem that plagues the social democratic and revisionist groups. It simply does not answer the first question materialists should ask: whose class interests are served by this organization? The class legitimacy of the corporatist state unions is simply taken for granted—after all, what communist would oppose a ‘basic organization of the workers’? The question should not be “are there workers in the organization”, it should be what is this organization actually doing? There were national socialist and fascist unions. Would an analysis of the NSDAP or the Democratic party or the Second International parties start with “the political party is the highest form of organization of the proletariat”? Obviously not: that would be pettifogging, not materialism. It amounts to substituting metaphysics for a concrete analysis of a concrete situation.” [*ibid.*]

As an example to point out exactly how ridiculous a metaphysical analysis of the American trade union movement really is, the NLP drew the following comparison:

“While this might sound counter-intuitive, because all of these organizations call themselves ‘unions’ and view themselves as the stewards of ‘organized labor’, the idea that an organization might call itself one thing, but objectively function as its complete opposite, is a central concept of Marxist philosophy. As Marxist-Leninist-Maoists, do we take for granted that the Communist Party of China under Xi Jinping is synonymous with the current Communist movement in China? We assume Comrade Saoirse would say no, but why? The modern CPC calls itself ‘communist’, has a powerful and long history of prior revolutionary leadership, has tens of millions of members and supporters throughout China, has political education courses with Marxist classics, and claims its ultimate goal is the achievement of a classless society (i.e. communism). But despite all this, it is pretty easy to see that the modern CPC is actually a bourgeois force in direct opposition to the Communist movement in China, much less synonymous with that movement.”
[*ibid.*]

In direct opposition to the metaphysical error is the error of eclecticism. Eclecticism seems to take all the factors into account, but in reality simply combines random ideas in an unscientific way. One such example was the polemic written against the NLP by the Red Star Communist Organization. RSCO superficially appears to attack the NLP from the left. RSCO made the utterly baseless claim of Economism, even though the crux of the NLP’s organizing is rejecting the rapidly diminishing economic concessions of the state unions in order to achieve political independence from the imperialist bourgeoisie in the trade union movement, mass

work which contributes to the process party reconstitution in myriad ways. This wrong claim was eclectically combined with the opportunist “theory” that lines taken in the mass movement don’t matter until Communist organizations reach a certain unspecified size. As such while they theoretically “agreed” with “analysis” of the state unionism thesis they did not believe in practically implementing it. As NLP pointed out in *For Marxism and Against Centrism on the Labor Question*:

“In this sense, even at the most basic stage of initial party-building that we find ourselves in, whatever the primary tasks might be, the need to simultaneously develop correct theoretical and practical work still applies, as does the need for revolutionary circles to base themselves in and lead the proletariat, or the need to correctly combine legal and illegal methods, etc.

To put things more simply: ignoring these contradictions and relationships, i.e. errors of Marxism, revisionism, and liberalism, do not become more okay the more embryonic party-building efforts are. These errors might be more common, or perhaps expected, but they are no less damaging and are not somehow more acceptable because there is no party or party embryo. The particular subjective stage or situation a given nation’s revolutionaries find themselves in does not change the universal components, principles, and methods of Marxism (which expresses itself as Marxism-Leninism-Maoism in the modern context), nor does it change the nature of monopoly capitalism i.e. imperialism.

The problem is that RSCO and Saoirse seem to take an “either-or”, mechanical, and non-dialectical position on our current tasks, on the dialectical contradictions and relationships inherent to these tasks, and seem to divide the advancement and the development of

ideological unity among Marxist circles from those same Marxists circles' theoretical and practical work within the spontaneous movement of the proletariat."

Perhaps the most eclectic part of RSCO's line was that it was "supported" with a quote from Gauche Prolétarienne, who took up the patently ultra-Left line that, "We don't hide the fact that we are resolutely opposed to unions." [*Blow for Blow*]

Another expression of eclecticism is the line of "boring from within". This is the idea that the reactionary trade unions can be reformed into being revolutionary. What this leads to in practice is tailism, as demonstrated by the repeated failures of the reformist caucuses to do anything other than redivide the loot of the state unions. This line was thoroughly repudiated in *Theory in the Labor Movement: A New Dayer's Response to Cosmonaut*:

"Allegedly, the fundamental issue with our outlook is that it 'is based on a non-dialectical conception of a homogenous rank-and-file opposed to a homogenous bureaucratic union leadership. They have no true understanding of the basic fact of dialectics that every unity is fraught with divisions, made of contradictions.' Of course, the authors provide no citation for this claim of 'homogeneity'. This is because nowhere in New Day has such a claim been made. In fact, the March 2023 edition, which is listed as a source in the Cosmonaut article, even states, 'Teamsters divides UPSers into different job classifications: inventing arbitrary pay scales and encouraging squabbles over the easiest jobs/routes. [...] Basically every task in the company has multiple people working on it, all with different pay rates and benefits. We do not have room here to go into detail regarding their political efforts at splitting...' The May 2023 edition even pointed out that there *are* divisions in the union bureaucracy, namely, 'Every time without fail, not just at UPS, the IBT proclaims for itself

the sole right to lead the workers, then does nothing and takes advantage of the ensuing confusion and demoralization to ram through concessions. (And every time, there are a handful of aspiring 'reformist' officials ready to exploit this for their own gain!)' The problem is not that the bureaucracy is homogenous or heterogenous. The problem is that the bureaucracy is constituted *not* on the basis of organizing the collective strength of the UPSers but on the basis of collaboration with the government to loot them. Regardless, it is dishonest to claim we have a 'homogenous' view of the rank-and-file and the bureaucracy when we have pointed out the huge material divisions among the UPSers as well as the perpetual internal struggle of the bureaucracy for a redivision of the loot. Hilariously, the Cosmonaut article itself refers to the IBT leadership monolithically a dozen times: 'Meanwhile the budding Vote No movement is facing attacks from all sides, including pseudo-Socialist groups, bourgeois media outlets, IBT leadership and Business Agents, and more.'

"As for the little lecture on contradiction, the authors forgot that, 'There are many contradictions in the process of development of a complex thing, and one of them is necessarily the principal contradiction whose existence and development determine or influence the existence and development of the other contradictions.' [Mao, *On Contradiction*] Their thinking is not dialectical, it is eclectic. It combines Marxist terminology with liberal labor politics. Their attitude towards the IBT was described by Lenin in 'Once Again on the Trade Unions,' 'His [Bukharin] theoretical attitude is: 'on the one hand, and on the other', 'the one and the other'. That is eclecticism.' On the one hand, we see, 'IBT leadership aligning with the whole of bourgeoisie,' and on the other hand, 'take advantage of contradictions within leadership to form tactical alliances.' On the one hand, 'break away from the sway of degenerate organizations like TDU (and related

pseudo-socialist organizations which tail O'Brien), and chart an independent course forward for the class struggle,' and on the other hand, New Day is chastised for doing exactly that instead of 'boring from within'. Is it not clear that the talk of dialectics and contradiction is really just an attempt to cover up an internally inconsistent worldview that swings between two absolutely exclusive poles?"

Another instance of eclecticism was the Maoist Communist Union, which combined the Avakianite program for the trade unions with open collaboration with Trotskyists. The blatant contradictions in their line were refuted thusly:

"The MCU is clearly and unambiguously repeating the revisionist dogmas about the labor movement, namely, the rot is limited mainly to the uppermost leadership, which in any event, is not "artificial" but is actually based in the working class, albeit its "relatively privileged strata". Of course, if they were simply repeating the old dogmas, it would be very hard to distinguish themselves from the likes of FRSO and DSA, so instead they pay lip service to reality: 'What's more, the leadership of the unions has been transformed into a literal bourgeois profession... the ranks of the union staff and bureaucracy are infested with people not from a working class background, who have become technocratic professionals and functionaries.' How do they explain away this obvious contradiction, between the union bureaucracy being infested with non-proletarians and this same bureaucracy being a genuine representation of the working class? 'We need to further investigate these realities...'

"These two claims cannot coexist, even less so alongside the patronizing claim that, "The reactionary officialdom does not exist magically above the class." Quite right. Either the reactionary officialdom is "a literal bourgeois

profession”, i.e. an “artificial” strata attached to the labor movement by the bourgeois legal apparatus and paid out of obligatory wage garnishments or they are an unfortunate but “organic” byproduct of a privileged strata of the workers. If they are the first, then it logically follows that cooperation with this strata is out of the question for the class conscious workers. If they are the second, then it logically follows that cooperation with this strata is an unfortunate but necessary price to be paid by communists fighting for communist leadership of the trade union struggle. Note also that it is not the bourgeois versus proletarian line that is being discussed—because these ‘unions’ are unambiguously following a bourgeois class collaborationist line—but rather artificial versus organic. What they cover up and completely theoretically muddle, is that the labor aristocracy-led unions of the pre-WWII era no longer exist but have been systematically adjusted and transformed over the last 80+ years into out-and-out state unions, organs of the bourgeois state and bourgeois professional class hoisted upon the workers. While these state unions still rely upon the reactionary domestic labor aristocracy as a key base of support, even the privileged sections of the working class have much weaker sway over the policy, structure, and decision-making of the modern state unions in comparison to the now much more influential bourgeois technocrats and politicians, not to even mention the complete shutting out of the broad non-labor-aristocratic proletarian masses.

“The MCU refuses to take a clear stand on this issue because they do not want to fight the state syndicalist strata but rather form “tactical alliances” with them.”
[*False Theories False Leaders: MCU in the Labor Movement*]

Eclecticism is typical of state union organizers precisely because their state union activity is so isolated from the trade

union masses. All one needs to do is fill out the proper forms, collect the necessary signatures, and then explain it away using whatever theory or slogan happens to be in vogue. All that is really needed to expose the intellectual poverty of the eclectics within the Democratic Socialists of America is the fact that, “The DSA is a 501c4 social-welfare organization that functions as the headquarters of opportunism in the labor movement. It attracts middle-class bureaucrat hacks who are opposed to the workers breaking with the bourgeois state, the Democratic party, and the class collaborationist union bureaucracy. Their policy is dressing up class collaborationism in class-struggle language, and swindling the workers with promises of concessions.” [*DSA: Bourgeois Center in the Labor Movement*]

Finally, and most appealing to Maoists, is the incorrect idea that correct trade union work is impossible or pointless until the party is reconstituted. This “theory” (which usually hinges on stretching the definition of Economism so as to include any trade union organizing) continues to be upheld by the Daltonite revisionist clique, of Red Guards Austin/CR-CPUSA/The Worker fame. This group is just blatantly hypocritical, flying from plagiarizing an NLP article (*Theory in the Labor Movement: A New Dayers Response to Cosmonaut*) to repeating the Cosmonaut line that the NLP is “sectarian” to fundraising on behalf of the IBT (See “Amazon Workers Authorize Strikes and Inspire Unionization Struggles Across the Country” from The Worker) who were condemned in both the Cosmonaut and NLP articles. Nevertheless, they are able to gather followers simply by telling them that they can do whatever they want in the labor movement—including working with the gangsters and sellouts in the Teamsters—and still be Communists so long as they “unite under Maoism”, i.e. accept their revisionist leadership. Such a line is highly appealing to the petty bourgeoisie, as evidenced by the widespread existence of such factions throughout the labor movement. The Worker has the dubious honor, however, of being the first to explicitly lay out the line that in the US, there is no

revolutionary subject: “The United States, as the sole, hegemonic, imperialist superpower, with all of its opportunism and bribery, is not able to produce the kind of revolutionary consciousness found in Russia then, nor in the Third World today.” [*Some Lessons on the Historical Experience of Constituting the Bolshevik Party*, The Worker] The fact is that many groups like MCU, RSCO and The Worker try to conceal their labor-liberal line behind the left-sounding but meaningless slogan (without elaboration into the specifics of what this means to each group in practice) that party-building is primary. Obviously, a liberal line on labor accepted within party construction could only lead to building a labor-liberal party, or no party at all. They provide a splendid example of the connection between tailing the bourgeoisie in the labor movement and liquidating the party.

The Worker’s claim that the US “is not able to produce the kind of revolutionary consciousness found in Russia then, nor in the Third World today” is rank American exceptionalism. But such exceptionalism is needed in order to smuggle in NGO employees as the real revolutionaries in the US. See the claim that, “Workers who do not create any value, those who work for Non Government Organizations, intellectual workers and so on, are not proletarians but as workers can find common ground and be united behind proletarian leadership... [which has no revolutionary consciousness?]” [*An Activist Asks How Can Student Occupations Help Us Win Our Demands*] The NLP criticized their attempt to stifle line struggle in the labor movement with the misapplied slogan “unite under Maoism” and substitute Maoism for labor liberalism thusly:

“As Mao explained in *On Practice*, our sole “criterion of truth” is social practice, especially class struggle. We are partisans of a particular class, the proletariat, and in this way our theory and practice must not only serve the interests of that class, but also must be products of the perspective and struggle of that class if they are to be considered actually Marxist. Marxism’s class

perspective and its materialist outlook are linked at the hip and form an immovable part of its approach to philosophy, political economy, and scientific socialism.

The Daltonite left-opportunist line represents a deviation from these elementary principles on both counts. Firstly, they represent a metaphysical deviation insofar as they fail to correctly comprehend the material realities of our country and the “external world”, instead inventing or perverting reality opportunistically as suits their subjective interests. Secondly, they represent a petty-bourgeois deviation insofar as they fail to consistently apply a class criteria in their analysis and synthesis, instead writing from a perspective that downplays, ignores, or outright negates class criteria when it comes to essential questions like the labor question, the question of the student movement, or the women question. Their positions on the labor question, and their de facto labor line, are especially illustrative insofar as they demonstrate both the Daltonites ignorance regarding the actual state of the workers’ movement in our country, and their inability to apply the most elementary of Marxist principles, the principles of class, correctly or consistently.”

“The material basis for the continued line struggle over this is found in the vast petty-bourgeoisie and labor aristocracy in the United States. Lenin wrote in *Imperialism and the Split in Socialism* that, “The important thing is that, economically, the desertion of a stratum of the labor aristocracy to the bourgeoisie has matured and become an accomplished fact; and this economic fact, this shift in class relations, will find political form, in one shape or another, without any particular ‘difficulty’. On the economic basis referred to above, the political institutions of modern capitalism—press, parliament associations, congresses etc.—have created political privileges and sops for the respectful,

meek, reformist and patriotic office employees and workers, corresponding to the economic privileges and sops. Lucrative and soft jobs in the government or on the war industries committees, in parliament and on diverse committees, on the editorial staffs of ‘respectable’, legally published newspapers or on the management councils of no less respectable and ‘bourgeois law-abiding’ trade unions—this is the bait by which the imperialist bourgeoisie attracts and rewards the representatives and supporters of the ‘bourgeois labor parties’.”

“It must be noted that while The Worker put forward the slogan of ‘The Workers Must Work to Destroy the Labor Aristocracy’, they put this forward only as the rallying cry of the lower and mid-level bureaucrats against the executives. This is demonstrated in their writing on the NEA Staff Organization’s (NEASO) strike. The NEASO is an organization for defending the rights of the middle-level NEA bureaucrats against the NEA membership and the NEA executives. This is undeniable evidence both of The Worker’s petty bourgeois editorial line and their continued inability to grasp reality, to correctly differentiate a trade union from a guild or professional association (much less a state-produced bargaining unit). For decades, the NEA has worked with reactionaries of all stripes to worsen the conditions of educators and students. The Worker says, ‘Opportunism exists in the current labor movement of the United States. It manifests itself primarily as the labor aristocracy but finds its roots in the very ideology taught by the unions themselves. In the present day, the labor unions are living on the imperialist superprofits of the United States economy. [...] The labor aristocracy stands in an effort to preserve the bourgeoisie, preserve imperialism, and ultimately preserve the capitalist monopoly on the world. [...] The work of any and all labor aristocrats is rendered impossible without the existence of these [NEASO,

DSA, AFL-CIO] internal staffing unions.’ Straightforward, one would think. Yet when one section of the labor aristocracy and bureaucracy, the NEASO, goes on strike, The Worker says, “The NEASO is correct to criticize the NEA for refusing to ‘uphold union values;’ ... The NEASO strike is justified, but the situation demands a correct and materialist analysis of the class character of the NEA and all other ‘yellow’ unions, which are staffed by the lieutenants of the organized labor movement, again doing the political work of the bourgeoisie.’ Which is it—is the NEASO strike a strike of labor bureaucrats seeking a better deal for themselves from imperialism, or is it a justified uprising against the higher-level lieutenants of the establishment labor movement? One wonders how the NLP is supposed to unite with people who cannot take a clear stance on such a basic issue as the class nature of the NEASO strike: can there be unity in the labor movement with people who are unable to apply class criteria in their “analysis”? [*In Defense of Marxist Principles*]

This “theory” is related to the Trotskyist “skipping-over” theory. This was the idea of “trying to skip over the backwardness, the reactionariness of the British trade unions, trying to get us to overthrow the General Council [the British equivalent to the AFL at the time] from Moscow, without the British trade-union masses. But we affirm that such a policy is stupidity, adventurism; that the reactionary leaders of the British trade-union movement must be overthrown by the British trade-union masses themselves, with our help; that we must not skip over the reactionary character of the trade-union leaders, but must help the British trade-union masses to get rid of it.” [Stalin, *The Anglo-Russian Unity Committee*] In the context of Party reconstitution, this means ignoring the trade union masses in the question of building Party leadership in the trade unions. The Party, as leader of the trade unions—the concrete representation of the leadership of the proletariat

over all the wage workers—cannot be built in isolation from the struggles of the trade union masses. This is axiomatic if it is to be a party of the revolutionary proletariat and not a Blanquist conspiracy or a band of cowards hiding from the reactionary trade union leaders.

What all these ideas amount to in practice is not Maoism, but Trotskyism. “Capitulation in practice as the content, ‘Left’ phrases and ‘revolutionary’ adventurist postures, as the form disguising and advertising the defeatist content—such is the essence of Trotskyism.” [Stalin, *Political Report of the CC to the Sixteenth Congress of the CPSU(b)*] Maoism requires bringing line struggle into the trade union movement, not carrying it out behind the backs of the trade union masses (in the form of meaningless literary endeavors) while “organizing” on behalf of the state in the form of the NLRB-sanctioned unions.

The line struggle in the labor movement is not over, and will not be fully exhausted until communism. The form that the line struggle takes is constantly evolving. The organization of the New Labor Organizing Committee and the unity that it represents around the revolutionary proletariat in the labor movement is a colossal step forward. It is the first time in decades that a new center of united labor organizations was established across multiple firms and multiple industries on the basis of applying communist ideology, by way of a coherent class line and set of strong class principles, to the trade union struggle. At every step of the way, mistaken ideas had to be consciously struggled with and new methods for linking up the spontaneous struggles of the masses with the revolutionary aims of the proletariat had to be devised. Yet even this is only a modest achievement, and without a Party and without the trade unions the proletariat will not be equipped for the great battles ahead.

Highlights from Line Struggle in the Trade Union Movement

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