

The New Labor Press

For a Revolutionary Labor Movement



A Worker's Guide to: Shop Organizing

Introduction

A correct approach to shop floor organizing is the cornerstone of the class-conscious labor movement. That is because fundamentally the basis of our movement is in the workplaces, on the shop floor, in the factories and warehouses, on the farms and in the mines, wherever labor is exploited by capital. The success or failure of our movement will be determined by our ability to mobilize, organize and politicize our fellow workers for the political and economic demands of our class, serving the eventual establishment of a workers' state via socialist revolution.

These fundamentals imply a correct approach to the creation and leadership of shop organizations, whether they be the most basic shop organizations like shop committees, or the most broad, like a class-conscious union center. In theoretically outlining, and practically implementing, this type of work we apply some of the most fundamental principles of the modern working class, like industrial unionism and class struggle.

A shop floor organization is an organization of the workers within a single workplace. It is the smallest body in the labor movement capable of making decisions and carrying them out collectively. On a literal level, it is simply two or more workers who have united on the basis of shared political-economic objectives. Political, because at a fundamental level all of our problems as workers come back to the capitalist mode of production and the capitalist government, and economic because many of our day-to-day problems have to do with pay, bad bosses, overwork, the isolation/robotic nature of our work, etc. Political struggle means challenging the political rule of the capitalists, or their representatives in the workplace, and economic struggle means challenging the particular rate of exploitation in the workplace through an improvement in working conditions, pay, slowdown in the work rate, etc. It is unthinkable that one struggle could take place without the other and so all labor organizations must unite on the basis of both.

The purpose of a shop organization is to organize a particular workplace, raise the political level of the workers there, and struggle for their immediate concrete demands. What this looks like will be different at every place of work. Nevertheless, there are certain ideological, political, and organizational features that are common across all shop floor organizations, and it must be this way if we are to achieve broader mobilization and organization on an industrial level without degenerating into the divisive,

weak, reactionary organizations that characterize the state-dominated labor movement. Due to the potential for repercussions, shop organizations must be organized semi-clandestinely. This means that on an organizational level things like the personal information of the workers in the shop organization and the specific details and extent of their work must be known only by those people contributing to the shop organization. This is practical necessity due to the presence of snitches and traitors in all workplaces, and to protect against the use of the capitalist legal system and its police to crush workplace organizing. Politically however the goals of the shop organization should be known among all the advanced and intermediate workers, and in the run-up to and during the course of actions like walk-outs, strikes, mass meetings, rallies, stand-outs etc., the organizational aims and plans of the shop floor organizations must be propagated, taught to, and grasped by the workers in a given workplace as appropriate.

To some shop organization members, their day-to-day tasks might seem very administrative, routine, or basic, like trying to regularly talk and listen to their co-workers, or consistently distribute a certain number of shop papers. While the day-to-day tasks of the shop organizations could superficially resemble routine administrative work, these tasks allow us to build up the capacity to successfully mobilize our co-workers and carry out much larger and more powerful actions like rallies, slowdowns, walkouts and strikes. Because of this unique capacity, politically and economically shop organizations are absolutely fundamental organizations of the working class. This makes a correct ideological and political orientation an important and permanent necessity in them. Reactionary ideas of any kind, whether it is something “casual” like homophobia or something more “professional” and “educated” like support for capitalist politicians, state unionism, opportunism or revisionism must be relentlessly criticized and its proponents corrected. The effect of these ideas in the long-term is to strengthen the capitalists, politicians, and corporate management by dividing us and pitting sections of the workers against each other. While the ideological-political basis of unity of shop organizations is class-conscious trade unionism (for a concrete example of this [see the New Labor Organizing Committee’s objectives and principles](#)), that doesn’t negate the need for the shop organizations to combat opportunism and revisionism in the labor movement or the need to study, learn from, and appropriately/correctly apply Marxist theory. The shop organization cannot tolerate opportunism, chauvinism or revisionism in any form within its ranks and must pursue the correct political line no matter the short-term costs. Otherwise it ceases to be a true shop organization and becomes little more than a gang for advancing the factional interests of a narrow minority of workers.

Part 1) Getting Started

When we start our organizing efforts in a workplace we should first aim to learn about it, so we can start to develop a plan. We may have worked in a place for a while, but how much do we really know about it? Even if we have been somewhere for a significant amount of time, it is important to systematically collect information so that we can test our knowledge and assumptions. To do this we need to investigate into things, both by mechanically researching into our workplace and also by talking with our coworkers. We should learn important statistics about the workplace to the best of our ability, how many people work there, how many work each shift, how much money does the company make, and where does that money go, along with other topics. This information is important to have as it will inform our strategy but will also help us in our conversations with coworkers. Take notes and know that there is never a limit to how much we can learn about something. Investigation into the technical aspects of your workplace, its political and economic past and present, the programs and principles of class-conscious labor organizations, and study of the ideology of the international

working-class, Marxism-Leninism-Maoism, should be the basis of the organizing plan and inform the editorial line of the shop paper.

A critical part of investigating is actually talking with our coworkers. You have to ask them questions, discover what their biggest issues with the workplace are, hear what they think the root is and what the solution is, and gauge their political level. Take notes afterwards if necessary. It's important in these conversations to be mindful about how much information is revealed about the shop organization that is being prepared or formed. There are individuals who, because they hold what seems to be labor-liberal or even Marxist opinions, are given excessive information because it is wrongly assumed that they will align themselves with the shop-floor organization. There are other individuals who, because of disinterest in trade-unionism or general apathy towards their coworkers, are erroneously excluded because it is assumed they are opposed to these things in principle. When assessing an individual, their own perception of themselves should be the last thing taken into consideration. What is important is their role in the workplace, their strengths and abilities, their class, their economic relationship with management and any bourgeois labor organizations, and their political ties. But the best way to assess an individual is simply to ask them if they are interested in what the shop paper has to say. If they respond to the shop paper's contents by defending the owners and management and attacking their coworkers, then they can safely be excluded from organizing activity.

Shop floor organizers must be able to organize their coworkers, fly under the radar of bosses, and develop organizing methods relevant to their work environment that will enable them to carry out their work with precision. They must have their fingers on the pulse of their workplace. They should be able to report on the attitude of their coworkers on matters involving the workplace and politics generally.

Through their daily activities, shop floor organizers should work to gain the confidence and support of their coworkers. This means the organizers must be the most knowledgeable and disciplined workers, never shirking the needs of their coworkers and definitely not pursuing privileges or taking the easy way out at the expense of those around them. The legitimacy of the organizers comes from their contribution in the workplace, their ability to mobilize and agitate their fellow workers to take action, and the correctness of their ideas. Leadership based on anything else is simply unprincipled factional leadership incompatible with the aims of the labor movement.

This highlights the need for organizers to study their industry and the specifics of their workplace. Gather information about your firm's corporate structure and management compensation, shady business dealings, company profits, and political connections with the local, state, and federal government. Study the history of labor organizing, unions, political economy, and workplace struggle. Philosophy, political economy, anything relevant to the work environment (no matter how abstract it may seem) should be utilized in order to deepen people's understanding of their environment. It is one thing to hate your boss, it is something else entirely to understand and work to destroy the entire the political-economic foundation they stand on. We encourage workers regardless of political affiliation to develop shop floor organizations and fight for their own economic interests and those of their coworkers. At the same time, we advocate that the leaders of these organizations should study and educate other workers on the scientific ideology of the proletariat. This ideology in the modern day is called Marxism-Leninism-Maoism. We believe this because we are not the first revolutionary workers to try and organize our workplaces, nor are we the last to do so. Maoist theory takes the long and proud history of the last two hundred years of workers' struggle, and defines the causes of the misery of the working class more profoundly and more correctly than any other theory, and it is precisely for this reason that Maoist ideas are easily assimilated by the workers and are the most potent force for giving

them a correct and scientific class stand, method, and world outlook. Reformist and bourgeois trade unionist ideas can only split and misguide them. Theoretical work cannot be separated from practical work: organizing plans and campaigns must always have a solid materialist analysis guiding them. To bring everyone together in shared action, who are our allies, who are our enemies, what must be done, and what challenges will have to be overcome in the process? These are fundamental questions that Maoism can answer in the abstract but it is the work of the shop organizations to turn those abstract answers into concrete plans, principles, programs and practice which serve as the guide and basis of unity for the class-conscious workers movement.

Every workplace can roughly be divided into three political levels, the advanced, the intermediate, and the backward. The advanced are your coworkers who see issues with the workplace and recognize that the owners and bosses are not their friends, that the workers need to get collectively organized to solve our problems, and will actively contribute to a specific campaign or even integrate themselves into the shop-floor machinery. The intermediate are those who recognize there are issues with the workplace, but are not yet interested in collectively organizing, struggling against management or state union bosses, or contributing to the shop-floor organization. The backwards are those who support management, want to channel the rebellious energy of the workers into dead-ends like electoralism and class collaboration, and are actively working against any improvement in the workers' condition. The exact proportions of these groups will vary wildly by time and place, and people frequently move from one camp to the other. This is the logical result of the pressure in bourgeois society to "go along to get along" as the Teamsters put it.

The advanced workers are those workers who are actively taking on the largest share of the work, behave in a principled manner towards their coworkers, and have a comparatively high degree of political and economic awareness. Once you have recognized who the advanced are, your most pressing task should be to try to bring them into your organizing efforts. This may be done through either direct integration into the shop-floor organization or the creation of a formally independent committee aimed at a particular campaign, such as a strike committee or a grievance committee. Such a committee should have the main shop-floor organizers as its hard core and its purpose (and limitations) should be clearly expressed in the central press organ (newsletter, shop paper, etc.). If you are still not at the point where there is a developed shop organization in your workplace, you should form an informal circle with these workers that you can later develop into a more formal committee or organization.

When such independent committees or circles are formed, they should embrace as many workers as possible, and their best elements should be actively recruited into the shop-floor machinery. It is absolutely imperative that the press organ and the organizers fight to elevate the political level of the intermediate. This means correcting their mistaken ideas in a polite, comradely manner, and elevating the theoretical level of their correct ideas. (For example, it is correct to despise middle level management, but people easily lose sight of the fact that tyrannical middle managers are the result of corporate-level policy, which itself is determined by the needs of the shareholders, top-level executives and the whole capitalist system.) The intermediate will likely be the bulk of the workforce and what each individual needs to advance will likely be different— and naturally there will be some stubborn centrists who simply refuse to abandon their narrow-mindedness. History and practice shows that the best educator is struggle. While propaganda is important, it is ultimately the rabid exploitation of the bourgeoisie that will provide the motive force capable of pushing huge numbers of intermediate workers into our camp.

The backwards workers are those actively shirking their work obligations to the detriment of others, mistreating their coworkers, and pushing reactionary political lines. Ultimately, these individuals are concerned solely with minimizing their responsibilities and maximizing their share of the wealth. They should be isolated and their pro-capitalist schemes exposed. By criticizing these individuals, the shop-floor organization demonstrates to the majority that it has their best interests at heart and will stand up against attacks regardless of where they come from. And it must be said that the most potent attacks come from the ranks of the workers themselves. The crushing blow against organized labor was not delivered by Pinkerton agents and state cops shooting down strikers, it was delivered by the leaders of organized labor who were in a position to sell off labor's gains, dismantle its organizations, sabotage its campaigns, and purge the best and most politically conscious workers. This cannot be forgotten for one second. It is absolutely intolerable for shop-floor organizations to entertain the needs of the backwards workers in the name of "unity" or personal friendships.

Part 2) Forming a Shop Floor Organization

Revolutionary labor organizing in the United States has been seriously neglected for almost a hundred years. Because of this, very few people have a lot of experience doing this sort of work, and those that do often only have a few years under their belt (us included). Using what we have learned since we began, we would say that practically speaking there are two mutually reinforcing sides to forming any kind of shop floor organization.

The first side is the administrative work of organizing the masses. Even in workplaces where the state unions are legally responsible for organizing the workers, there is usually no real system or shop-floor apparatus for actually doing so. It is the job of the workers to construct it, but they must construct and maintain it according to their own needs and capabilities and with their own organizational independence as its basis. We are not in the business of "doing the dirty work" of the state unions just so we can betray our principles, be stabbed in the back, and then cast aside later on. In workplaces controlled by the state unions, we want to take advantage of their unwillingness to collaborate with the rank and file and should organize to replace them at the head of the rank and file. In workplaces without state unions, construction of the initial shop-floor apparatus should be considered the primary task of the organizers. This is the material basis for workers' power, not the legal maneuvering of ourselves or the state unions. If those systems can be avoided altogether, then that course should be pursued, but if they have already inserted themselves in some way then they should be worked with only on the basis of formal independence and clearly-defined terms dictated by the majority of the workers.

This administrative work must be organized according to the literal physical or industrial structure of the workplace. Consider the following diagram roughly representing the organization of shop committee for one shift in a medium-sized logistics warehouse:

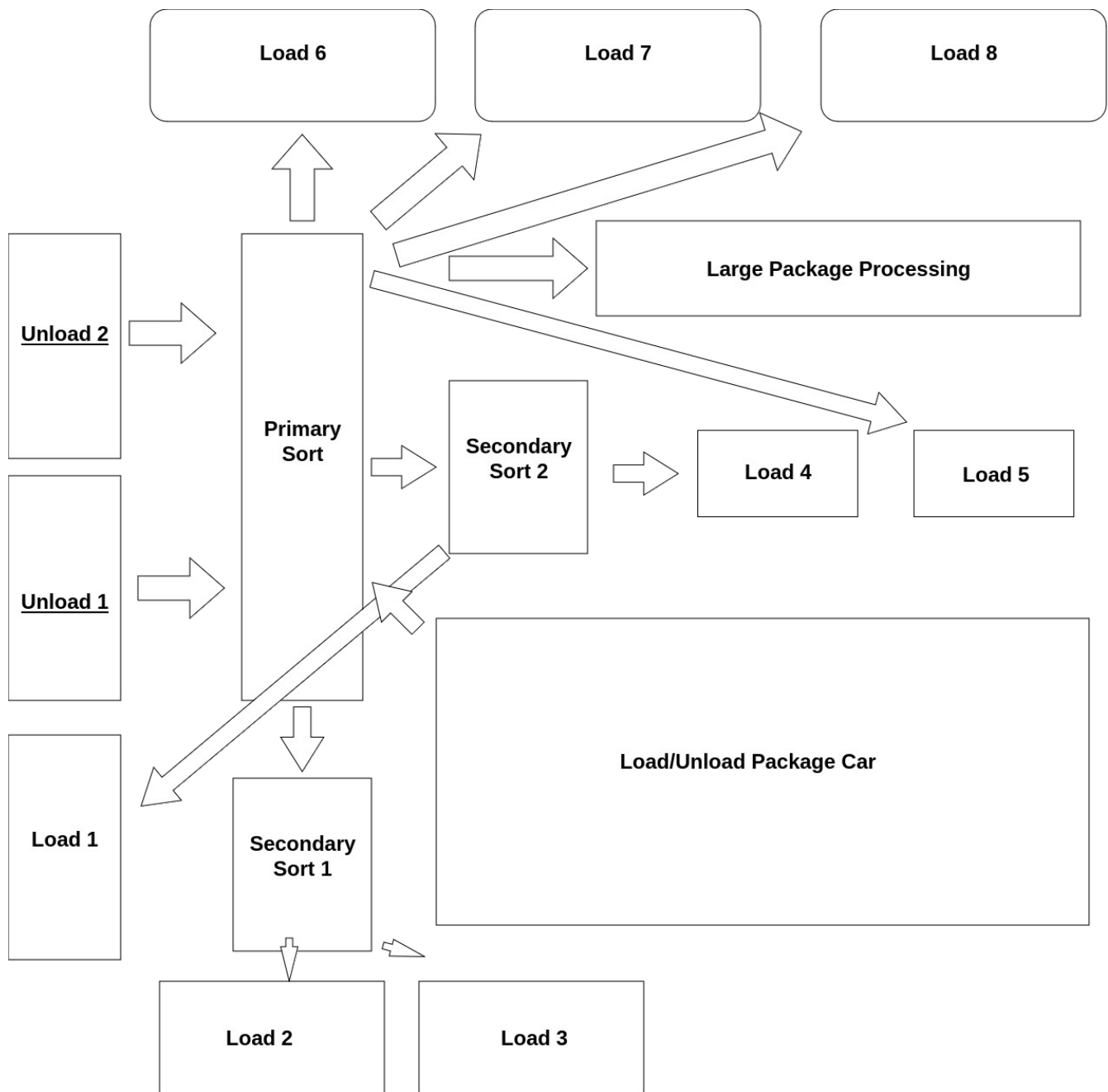


Image: Example from UPS on how to map out production for shop committee purposes.

This primitive diagram is meant to illustrate the concept of organizing according to the operation. The warehouses and factories are organized according to belts, and so organizers in these types of operations should keep track of exactly who is staffed, where, and what their level of organization is. In the workplaces of other industries that are structured on different lines, work has to be done to map out what production looks like and how the workers are physically organized. Are we capable of distributing propaganda to them in a timely manner? When do they take breaks and where? Can they be relied on to contribute and in what capacity—even simply offering opinions, operational information, or proposing their own plans counts as a contribution, and helping distribute information or becoming organizers themselves is even better. Who is likely to rat, who is sympathetic, who is on the fence? These are extremely important questions and every time the possibility for action is raised, it is the task of the organizers to figure out the answer. Depending on the workplace, lists of staffing/job

assignments/seniority may even be available to the organizers courtesy of the company. These should absolutely be taken advantage of.

People in other environments, for instance schools, hospitals, and restaurants, will organize themselves not according to transmission belts but by building, floor, jurisdiction and craft divisions, and so their organization will look different from the warehouses and factories. This is what we mean by the term “shop floor machinery”, the literal apparatus responsible for gathering and transmitting information. The state unions, because they keep all decision-making power to themselves, have zero use for information from the workers, are uninterested in their needs and plans and are often outright hostile to them, and so they long ago dismantled the machinery necessary to consistently and regularly mobilize the workers. Even the “progressive” unions have only fragments of such an apparatus here and there, usually in the form of a tiny number of stewards who focus on the grievances of the upper stratum of the workers and the occasional meeting held at a union hall. The machinery of the shop organization, in contrast, must be tailored to the specific workplace and organizers must establish a logical area of responsibility corresponding to their daily habits. They should expand their influence as much as possible among the people they see on a daily basis and then consolidate the most enthusiastic supporters, bring them into their ranks, and thereby expand the organization by bringing in new people who have different but overlapping daily habits. In this way, the shop organizations are like tree roots, steadily growing out further and further and nourishing itself to facilitate further growth.

The second side is the ideological-political orientation of that work. The state unions have demonstrated, and history has demonstrated in a million different ways, that even tens of millions of organized workers are completely helpless if these organizations are dominated by the bourgeoisie. And the domination of the bourgeoisie is an inevitability if the rank and file is not equipped with revolutionary theory and politics, and is not willing to stand up against incorrect ideas and even physical assault. The growth of the shop organizations has the effect of weakening them ideologically and politically, since less experienced and therefore less theoretically sound people are brought in, which may in the long run hinder their further growth if left unaddressed. Therefore consistent political and ideological work is an absolute necessity among the organizers and in their day-to-day work. The creation of a central press organ, like a shop paper or some other regular publication tailored to the needs and capabilities of the average worker in the industry, is an absolutely fundamental task for the shop-floor organizations. Without this, their degeneration into adjuncts of the bourgeois state is a near-guarantee, and even if they do maintain some formal independence, it will be for naught. The organizers, or at least the most theoretically knowledgeable leaders of the organizers, should establish a press organ and create a routine of organizers distributing their ideas and synthesizing the demands and conditions of the workers in a publication to be circulated among the broad mass of workers outside the shop organization. The ideological-political work and practical work of the shop organizations have a dialectical and mutually supporting relationship to one other. For example, when a strike or shop floor campaign inevitably reaches a set of obstacles or challenges, the extent to which the shop paper has helped to raise the political and class consciousness of the workers involved can be the deciding factor as to whether the action overcomes its obstacles and is successful or whether these small obstacles turn into a slow and inevitable demobilization and defeat (see the sections below for more details on creating and writing a shop committee and shop paper).

Shop organizations have to be able to assess the immediate needs of their workplace as things arise. That being said, they should also pay attention to larger political and economic developments in their industry and even matters of global importance such as colonial wars. The easiest way to spot an enemy agent among the workers is through their beliefs on seemingly unrelated matters. It might seem odd to some people to disqualify a transphobic, sexist, racist or Zionist worker from participating in

important shop organization decisions. But it would be even odder to expect a sexist organizer to be capable of defending the interests of female workers, or a transphobe or a Zionist to be capable of defending the interests of the transgender or Arab workers respectively. The majority of workers are non-white, non-male, immigrants, etc.—so naturally anyone who is picking and choosing whose interests they will represent and whose they will not represent cannot be trusted to safeguard the interests of all of the workers.

In summary, shop organizations and shop-floor organizers have the immediate task of building up a formal administrative apparatus led by a central organ capable of political-economic agitation and scientific analysis of the workplace. The pinnacle of unity between these two is in the construction, promotion, and execution of campaigns around specific issues. By putting their administrative and ideological affairs directly into the hands of the workers, the shop organizations can successfully raise the political and class consciousness of their coworkers and simultaneously improve their working and living conditions. In doing all this, the shop organizations lay the basis not only for advancing the material conditions of the workers, but also for their seizure of state power and the administration of society as a whole by the workers.

A) The Shop Committee System

The shop committee system is the backbone of the class-conscious trade union movement, and the basic method of trade union organizing as opposed to the capitalist methods of trade union organization. The shop committee system is the organizational form best suited to carrying out the trade union struggle because it bases itself on the existing division of labor in the production process, and both democratically brings the workers together into decision making bodies, while also centralizing the carrying out of their struggle through the formation of collective discipline and centralized shop floor-based struggle mechanisms. This might be compared to the modern state unionist steward system, where single representatives are appointed over hundreds or even thousands of workers as their legally-mandated link to human resources, the bosses and the owners, or the remnants of the old apprentice-master system still utilized in certain building trades and craft unions.

The scientific and democratic character of the shop committee system is particularly important at many proletarian workplaces, where there are a huge number of workers each carrying out their own specialized tasks essentially alone for the majority of the working day. A robust system of collective leadership and representation is a necessary condition for successful trade union struggle. Only a fully developed and efficient shop committee system is going to be able to gather the workers' demands, organize them into a plan, and disseminate this plan back among the workers for them to unite with. The mafia-style clique system and the nonprofit volunteer system—the way state union locals establish leadership—have been proven through experience to be incapable of anything other than class collaborationism and corruption.

At the same time, a shop committee can easily be wrecked if it is steered down this very same path of class collaborationism. Political and ideological errors and distortions have a disorganizing effect on the working class. There are reformist groups who advocate for the shop committee system on the basis of improving the efficiency of class collaboration and creating new job opportunities for liberal activists. This is why the connection between the shop committee and its press/theoretical organ, usually a shop paper, is a practical necessity.

Thus there are three basic questions that must guide the shop committee's organizing activity. The first question is the literal physical, technical and human organization of the operation, as noted earlier. How is the work being conducted, who is conducting it, under what conditions, with what demographic conditions, with what relation to management and ownership, etc.? Equipment, personnel, routes, labor-management relations, division of the workload, and specialized training—the actual nuts and bolts of how the work gets done. The second question is the economic and political interests of the workers. Wages, hours, unsafe conditions, shoddy equipment, management harassment, discrimination, bureaucratic or political repression, fees/penalties/taxes, anything (and anyone) in daily life that is a burden on the people must be considered a potential target for the trade union struggle, exposed before the workers represented in the shop committee system, and leveraged in order to mobilize and organize the workers. Thus, the third question is the ability of the workers to fight for these interests and the methods available to them. The basic tools in the trade union struggle are the strike, the slowdown, the walkout, and other forms of economic struggle. The shop committee system can only draw its strength from the discipline and unity of the workers. In the trade union struggle this means their ability to control their own labor, the pace of the work, and shut it down completely if circumstances call for it.

These three questions all have one thing in common: they objectively exist and therefore can be independently verified. That is the work of the representatives in the shop committee system. If the workers feel like someone cannot tell the difference between true and false, or right and wrong (from the standpoint of the workers), it is vital that this person be rectified or replaced with someone more capable who their co-workers trust. When the workers feel like their well-being is connected inseparably to the smooth functioning of their trade-union organization, and actively intervene to ensure it operates in a correct and principled way—only then can the shop committee system be said to be firmly established and secure. The shop committee system must be defended from every chauvinist and capitulationist type of thinking, whether it is liberalism, anticommunism, fascism, or any other bourgeois political ideology, or antisocial ideas such as homophobia, transphobia, racism, misogyny, etc. The representatives have to be able to differentiate between themselves holding an incorrect idea that is correctly being criticized by the workers, and the workers holding an incorrect idea that must be criticized. The representatives are nothing more than squad leaders of their work area—they can have no right to lead if they can't fulfill their duties to their coworkers, and criticism and self-criticism are among those duties.

The shop committee system has one other important feature. This is the ability to fuse together trade unionists across company and industrial lines. There is only one proletariat, yet there are ostensibly many trade unions and political parties. This contradiction is explained by the fact that these trade union organizations follow the political line of the bourgeoisie, and in the trade union struggle, this means divide and conquer the workers. The point of the shop committee system is that it is not wedded to a bureaucrat clique or mob leader. The shop committee system is composed exclusively of workers who are actually working in the operation. In this way, it maximizes both the potential for political independence from the bourgeoisie and the potential for unity with other trade union organizations.

The first step in building up the shop committee system, is using the social investigation and class analysis (SICA) work done during the contact/circle period to create a shop paper and devise campaigns, proposals, actions, and demands that can be circulated among the workers. This implies administrative work on the back end, and means establishing a group (or even just a couple people) responsible for gathering information for the committee, establishing a roll of readers of the shop paper that includes name (not necessarily a full legal name, and definitely not a full legal name if this list is being brought onto company property), work area/shift, and job class, distributing the newsletter among the people who are interested in reading it, holding mass meetings, and then following up with

those people in order to bring them into the practical organizational tasks and plans of the shop committee.

This step, of actually implementing the administrative and practical tasks of the shop committee in a systematic and organized way, is the main method of transforming a lone class-conscious contact, or a small inactive circle, into an actual force, into a real shop committee. As the reach of the shop committee is expanded and more workers accept the necessity for contributing to the trade union struggle, the most intelligent, principled, and active workers should be recruited to the shop committee system on the basis of executing some task. This task could be something like consistently distributing the newsletter to a particular work area or group of people month to month, or some lesser task like gathering information, writing up something for the newsletter, or giving suggestions for campaigns and participating in them. Representatives of the shop committee must themselves be able and willing to contribute to the collective strength of the workers in some way and lead by example in order to identify others.

The identification and creation of shop committee representatives is accomplished mainly through a mix of propaganda work, and observation of those workers in concrete moments of struggle and problem-solving on the shop floor. The shop committee conducts propaganda work and maps out the operation, then on the basis of this propaganda work and operational guide the shop committee system can be built up through struggle. Through the shop committee system, propaganda work can be expanded on the basis of organizing concrete economic action, and the process is able to continue on a higher plane until workers have built up a fully functioning trade union apparatus capable of leading a strike against the owners. This is a constant process of expansion—as the shop committee strives to expand to workers it has no contact with—and consolidation—as the shop committee strives to raise the political level and organizational strength of the workers it does have contact with.

Ideally the shop committee should encompass every section of every shift in every building of the production process. However, the shop committee should not hold off on economic action until this is accomplished. On the contrary, economic action should be considered one method for building up the shop committee system. If it is only partially built up, then it is a question of partially winning demands in order to prove the need to build up the shop committee to the rest of the unorganized workers.

The legitimacy of the representatives comes from their daily contribution in the workplace, their ability to organize their coworkers to fight for their immediate demands, and the correctness of their ideas and practice. Leadership based on anything else is simply unprincipled factional leadership incompatible with the aims of the class labor movement. The representatives have to be the most active, proactive and intelligent workers, in an all-round sense. They also have to be efficient in their organizing work, given the conditions of the modern capitalist workplace or enterprise.

In this sense, trade-unionism is simple—gather the demands of the working masses and unite them behind a plan to conquer them through economic action, working to politicize them in the process and further their organization. The hard part is actually carrying out and implementing this task. The shop committee system has gathering and transmitting information back and forth among our fellow workers, and converting this back-and-forth into campaigns, actions and practice, as the majority of its work. Any problems the workers face, any deviation from the norm by management, or any proposals/demands put forward by the workers need to be passed up the shop committee system so they can either be united with other people's demands into an actionable plan or disseminated through the newsletter. (Especially if management is inventing new techniques or implementing new technology, as these have serious implications for trade union organizing.) These are the main criteria that must be

considered when choosing representatives. Representatives must have solid job knowledge, communication skills, be active/take initiative, and correct trade union politics.

Once a small number of representatives have been found, and the operation is mapped out, then it becomes a question of sending existing representatives into unorganized territory or recruiting new ones. Each work area should have a representative, plus floats assigned to roam between specific work areas, as well as representatives assigned to the skilled jobs. Most enterprises are broken down by building, then shift/sort, then work area/job assignment. Every building level committee must clearly map out the operation along these lines, conduct the widest possible propaganda, hold regular meetings and conversations, and recruit representatives on the basis of agreement with the basic principles of trade unionism or with a specific economic action.

To summarize, class-conscious trade-unionists across the country are currently transitioning from the earliest stages of trade-unionism, namely, that of a propaganda circle or an informal mass meeting, to the rudiments of trade union strength, shop committees and other labor organizations capable of carrying out economic action. The demands and the methods of struggle must match the development of the trade union organization of the workers in a given shop. This means that the greater the development of the shop committee system, the more direct the assault on the capitalists can be and the greater the economic and political demands to be won must be. Regardless of advances and setbacks, which are inevitable in this type of work, the basic tasks and methods remain the same, although they grow in complexity. At all times, the trade unionists need to maintain a press organ for disseminating relevant information concerning the trade union struggle (which is discussed in the section below), base their organizing on the objective needs and capabilities of the workers and the situation at their enterprise, and work patiently to consolidate leadership out of the most advanced class-conscious proletarians who make up the hard core of the workers. As the leader of the Russian workers and peasants Vladimir Lenin said, “The first commandment of every trade union movement should be: ‘Do not rely upon the state,’ rely only upon the power of your class. The state is an organization of the class in power. Do not rely upon promises, rely upon the power of union and upon the consciousness of your class.” [The Need for an Agricultural Laborers' Union in Russia]

B) Shop Paper

In the course of their work, every shop committee will find itself in need of some kind of publication. Whether it is a single sheet that can be easily distributed throughout a large warehouse or a trimesterly zine for educators, every labor organization needs a central organ for disseminating information about conditions, proposing plans for united action, and discussing important political and economic developments. The purpose of this guide is to establish basic principles that the writers should adhere to in the course of their work.

At its core, the shop paper must combine the day-to-day hardships of the workers with the long-term perspective needed for their final resolution. Every development in the workplace must be explained in the context of broader political and economic developments, and no injustice is too minor for the shop paper. The shop paper is the real “organizer” of the workplace, giving the shop committee organizers greater direction and giving the mass of unorganized workers deeper knowledge of their workplace and their role in society.

Shop paper work is extraordinarily complex. It cannot simply repeat the complaints of the workers. The central contradiction of shop paper work is leaving the least room possible for opportunist distortion while reaching the widest possible audience. It must balance the particular and the general aspects of the workers' struggles. It must be the representative of the workers in the particular workplace and it must promote cooperation with other workers in the same industry. The low level of formal education of many proletarians must be overcome through meticulous editing work without turning the shop paper into an organ of the aspiring intellectuals, especially the students, who are attracted to activism but are loathe to give up their backwards ideas.

New Labor Press has links to examples of existing shop papers for people to take inspiration from, but every shop paper must be adjusted to the specific conditions of the workplace and the prevailing political and economic conditions.

The shop paper is an absolutely indispensable tool for suggesting/executing campaigns around specific issues, promoting a principled political and economic outlook, and struggling against incorrect ideas among both organized and unorganized workers. It is also a great tool for establishing inter-workplace unity. Its utility is so broad, and the required investment so low, that we consider the establishment of a shop paper an absolute necessity for any organizer in a sector or workplace without one. It is highly possible, especially while the shop committee is still small, that it will be the same people doing both jobs, and with growth, only a minority will be needed to maintain the press organ.

There must be ironclad unity between the shop paper and the leadership of the shop committee. If some organizers suddenly decide to go "off plan" and pursue their own narrow factional interests or start promoting a reprehensible political line or carry out anti-worker actions (even so-called "petty" interpersonal things like sexual harassment, which is endemic in the state unions) then it is the responsibility of the press to expose this. At the same time, if the writers and editors of the press organ suddenly embrace reaction or put their own personal inclinations above the broader political and economic interests and capabilities of the workers, then they should be struggled with, and if they refuse to be rectified should be replaced if not kicked out of the organization completely. This is why it is absolutely imperative that everyone involved understand basic class ideals, especially solidarity and discipline. Only through principled and well-defined cooperation by everyone involved can the shop committee actually fulfill its responsibilities.

The central problem of writing a shop paper is leaving the least room possible for opportunist distortions while reaching the widest possible audience. Many labor writers think only in terms of the latter, and consequently, their writing ends up an extremely vague sloganeering mess of labor-liberal and revolutionary terms. It is absolutely critical to establish a central thesis ahead of time. What is the point of the article? Why should any worker read it? The struggle against opportunism is the lifeblood of the shop paper. It is not an optional feature nor can it be an afterthought when writing for a shop paper. The editorial line must be for the proletariat and against the bourgeoisie and in particular against the representatives of the bourgeoisie within the ranks of the workers.

Specificity, specificity, specificity: this cannot be emphasized enough. This is why vague terms like "the bosses" should be generally avoided or omitted. It might seem like a no-brainer to rail against "the bosses" since everyone hates their boss, but such phrases are very unclear and can confuse or hinder attempts to build unity and political or class consciousness. Are you talking about the union bosses or company management? Are you talking about low-level managers, who are implementing corporate policy, or middle and corporate managers who are responsible for making it? It must also be noted that

"the masses", "the workers" and "proletarians/proletariat" are not synonymous. There is a great amount of diversity among all the wage earners and writers must be absolutely clear who they are talking about. An educated wage earner at an insurance company who makes 70k a year from the insurance racket sitting at a desk is not equal to a warehouse worker making less than half of that loading thousands of pounds an hour in sweatshop conditions--even if they are both technically "workers". Where there are divisions, they should be noted, if there is grounds for unity across these divisions, they too should be noted. For instance, at UPS the package car and trailer drivers make way more money and are treated way better by the union and management than the inside workers. But there are legitimate grievances they have that make unity a possibility. (But not an inevitability!) The writer should always and everywhere defend and promote the interests of the "deepest and most profound" sections of the workers and write from their point of view. If your shop paper or shop committee does not currently have any members or contributors from the most basic and exploited divisions of your workplace, then special attention should be paid into making contact with, listening to, and integrating and building up workers from those sections, as well as workers who represent other oppressed or marginalized groups like women workers, immigrant workers, non-white workers, gay or trans-workers, etc. As a general rule, only the proletarians will be consistently revolutionary and only their interests will consistently coincide with those of the long term interests of the proletariat and working masses.

This means when privileged sections of the workers and even the petty bourgeoisie's problems are dealt with--and they should be when they are relevant, all the big warehouses have contingents of IT professionals and mechanics--the solutions offered must be compatible with the aims of the mass of workers. This means, for example, technological advances like automation and AI should not be attacked in principle as always bad. Instead, it must be pointed out that technological advancement has the potential to either lighten the burden of the proletarians, or be used to implement mass layoffs and drive the privileged workers down into the proletariat and that the well-being of both proletarians and the petty bourgeoisie depends on united struggle to control how such technology is implemented. Reactionary schemes, conspiracy theories, and Luddism must be exposed for their theoretical fraudulence (especially where they are popular among the workers) and a legitimate alternative provided.

Details must be included, sources listed, etc. For instance, don't say "the union contract is bad." Explain how a particular article empowers management and in what way. Name laws, specific people and organizations, dates, etc. Specific dollar amounts to executives and political parties, agreements, government committees, etc, all these are important details. Do not overlook the minutiae--the devil is in the details and the company wants its critics to be amateurish in their analysis. Such amateurishness must be avoided, and if this means poring over dry corporate documents and legal cases, then it must be done. At the same time, don't get lost in these: it is important to compare the formal legal standards and agreements to their actual implementation, especially in the context of state union contracts, which are frequently "understood" by the company and union to be worthless or even completely opposite from what they say.

Overly rosy language and especially metaphors should be avoided if they are for purely literary purposes. On the other hand, if a direct comparison can simplify the issue, then do so. (For instance, many Teamsters compare their locals to an "old boys club", since it really only functions for people in the right social circle.)

Scientific analysis: subjectivism must be avoided at all costs. Do not simply say "it's a sellout contract". Explain in the context of market trends, corporate history, previous union agreements, recent

revenue/profits, inflation, etc why it is objectively a sellout contract. Quarterly earnings reports for public companies are a goldmine for shop papers, especially the company's own analysis of its labor relations. These and any public statements from corporate should be thoroughly dissected.

Calls to action: way too often people think being revolutionary or an organizer is about picking an action and simply telling the workers to do it. This ties in to the problem of subjectivism and specificity. A specific problem should be identified, and it must be clearly demonstrated what particular action is best able to solve it and why, and most importantly, explain what the obstacles are and how they can be overcome. Most state union contracts explicitly ban slowdowns, strikes, etc during the duration of a given contract and will have clauses saying the union is not responsible for such actions. There are laws against insubordination at work. If you issue a call to action without explaining these things, and building the unity and organizational basis among the workers that would be necessary for such actions to succeed, that is agent provocateur-ism and adventurism. At the same time, never issuing a call to action amounts to rightism. It fosters nihilism insofar as it fails to put forward an alternative vision and promotes the idea that there is no way out other than to accept the status quo for the foreseeable future. Ideally, you should gather the problems of the workers, make a coherent plan and explain it in the shop paper, then follow up with the shop organization to see if your organization has been successful in building a solid embryo of workers interested in implementing the plan. The shop paper and the shop floor organization mutually reinforce each other in this way. You should be constantly fighting the theories of easy victory and inevitable defeat. Also, make sure the call to action is actually aimed at the readers. For instance, a particular Trotskyist group which had pretenses about organizing truckers, issued the slogans "nationalize Yellow trucking" and "nationalize the railroads". Such a call to action is doubly wrong. In our current pre-revolutionary conditions, it is wrong to call for the means of production to be handed directly to the old bourgeois state, and it is wrong to tell the workers who currently have no say in state bureaucratic affairs to nationalize anything under the control and leadership of reactionary capitalist governments rather than their own leadership and the leadership of a revolutionary proletarian state. Such a call was wrong in that it objectively did not serve the interests of the workers and also objectively could not be carried out by them anyway—unsurprisingly, the call was completely ignored.

Clarity, specificity, objectivity, and correct class politics; these are the defining features of a well-written shop paper. Scientific investigation outside the shop floor and social investigation on the shop floor are key to producing quality writing befitting of a shop paper. The shop paper should echo the innermost feelings of the workers and elaborate their interests on a firmly scientific basis. The slogan of the class-conscious writers must be, "From the masses, to the masses!"

The point of the shop paper is to get everyone in the existing or future bargaining unit on the same page theoretically and politically, in particular regarding the relationship between the workers, the owners/employers, their agents in the labor movement (the company/state unions), and the collective actions that need to be taken due to these exploitative and repressive relationships. This mass agitation and consciousness raising requires patient and systematic work among the actual workers in the operation, not just throwing statements out on social media and seeing what happens like the state unions and their activists do. **PATIENT AND SYSTEMATIC CANNOT BE EMPHASIZED ENOUGH.** It is better to have a small number of people who read the newsletter consistently month-to-month and can be counted on for feedback and relied on for participation in other aspects of revolutionary trade union work than to hand out a hundred copies of a single edition and then never follow up with anyone.

It's also important to keep in mind that people don't have to agree with everything or even most things to read the shop paper. If everyone automatically knew all the facts and were making perfect sense of them, then there would be no need for a shop paper in the first place. At the same time, management and their allies will fight vociferously against any independent media operated by the workers for the purpose of criticizing them. Consequently, every precaution should be taken to conceal the newsletter from management and state union staff. Indeed, it is often the case that the state union staff can be more territorial, vicious, and repressive regarding independent worker initiatives than the employers. It is within our rights to discuss the bargaining unit, but just to be safe, distribution (especially with new people) should be done whenever possible off the clock, whether during break or after punching out or before start of the work day.

Copies of the shop paper should be handed directly to the workers and not left lying around somewhere for people to take. This can only increase the chances of the wrong person seeing it and investigating further and reduce the chances of the right person reading it. This also ties in to the need for distributors to be carefully monitoring the mood of the workers, and the goal of establishing a physical presence on the shop floor itself.

In workplaces where turnover is high, extra attention should be given to the veteran long-term employees, but the new hires who want to stick it out or want to be involved in bargaining unit activity shouldn't be ignored either. The same is true of the better-paid skilled workers: their support cannot be taken for granted for one second, but if they can be won over then they should be considered an absolutely vital resource. Don't be afraid to plainly ask people where they are going: do they want to join management, are they looking to leave the company altogether, are they looking for an organizing job in a state union, or do they want to stay and sweat it out in the operation? So long as someone proves themselves to be trustworthy, is not looking to be a lackey for management or a state union, and has no history of snitching, at some point they should be simply told that there is a semi-hidden workers' opposition within the bargaining unit, and frankly asked if they want to read their newsletter. If they say no, then the answer is no. We aren't here to badger anyone into doing something they don't want to do, and it is only through long-term patient practical and theoretical work that the more reluctant workers will be brought up and won over.

If they say yes though, they should be given a copy, told not to share it with management or other "interested parties", and followed up with in a timely manner. What do they agree with, disagree with, is there something they think we should be talking about, did something crazy happen on the job, do they have questions about conditions at other buildings/companies we can answer, and how can we best integrate them into the work if they support the newsletter?

The establishment and consistent maintenance of a roll for the workplace is extremely important. Once someone has read one edition and expects to read future ones, it is extremely important that this person's name and work area be recorded in a safe place so they can be followed up with regularly. If the clandestine methods of organization are fully applied in a way appropriate to the workplace, and the workplace also has a state union or organizing committee leaning towards state union representation, there will be two trade union centers operating in opposite parallel. In building up the distribution network of the shop paper, you are effectively building up a clandestine means of communication among the trade union masses which may prove to be the decisive factor in an acute trade union struggle where the state union leaders are deliberately misleading and leaving the trade union masses in the dark while they negotiate a sellout in secret.

Under no circumstances can the distribution roll be turned over to a manager or state union or in any way subordinated to their work. The roll should include how many copies were distributed each edition, and who and what job class they were distributed to. Ideally these numbers should reflect the actual composition of the workforce, but even if they don't, it lets us know our audience as well as the extent of our influence among the workers, which in turn determines what course of action we can take—are we influential enough to lead a wildcat strike, a slowdown inside, a rally, etc.

The shop paper is the key theoretical link in the broader practical work and leadership of the shop committee, and distribution is an essential key function in the work of the shop paper. Whether distribution is done well or poorly can make or break the work of the shop floor organization, can either take it and the workers it organizes to new heights, or condemn it to failure.

Part 3) The Leap from Shop Organization to Trade Union

A) In an Unorganized Shop

In the non-organized shops, the task of the shop organizations is to begin preparing the basis for the formation of class-conscious trade union organizations. These independent trade union organizations have their own unique characteristics and differ from the way state unions are organized in a number of very important ways. In particular, a correct approach to creating independent, class-conscious and combative trade unions means applying three key principles: industrial unionism, unions as class organizations, and “it is right to rebel”.

Unions Must Be Organizations of Our Class. To class-conscious workers and revolutionaries, unions are supposed to be the basic economic organizations *of the working class*. They are supposed to be class organizations of the proletariat; organizations that belong to and are created by the workers of the world, and not anyone else. The legitimacy, structure, membership, and activity of unions is supposed to be derived exclusively from the workers, their representatives, and their leading organizations. In the modern day however, most supposed trade unions are not actually unions in this sense because their legitimacy, structure, membership, and activity is derived from the law, the courts, and from the recognition and support of the capitalist state. These organizations are not real unions, but rather state unions. Whether or not the workers actually like these unions, their leaders, their rules, or what they do doesn't matter. The boss or the law says this union is the union that represents your workplace, and any workers who want a change in union are going to have to go through a long and complicated court process run by the capitalist state, which will inevitably go nowhere, because the only type of organization that could lead the workers collectively to overthrow corrupt union leadership is an actual *trade union*, leading many workers back to square one.

Most workers understand that this situation is bad on all levels for ourselves, our fellow workers, and our chances of victory in the many battles and struggles we face. But state unionism has become so dominant that many workers and organizers don't even practically know how a real trade union should be structured anymore. To begin to answer this question, we can go back to how trade unions were organized before the National Labor Relations Act and Taft-Hartley Act, the two most important pieces of modern US state unionist legislation, were passed. Before this the unions, even conservative capitalist unions, were independent organizations created and run by workers. They played by their own rules, had their own structures and systems, struggled using economic and political action as they saw fit, and achieved concessions and contracts directly with the owners and employers, without the

state acting as a mediator between the two sides making sure labor was “playing by the rules” of the system. This all came to an end when sell-outs and opportunists in the revolutionary movement and the workers movement decided it was better to give up most of their rights for some short term contract gains in the 1930s and 40s, which were quickly reversed in the following decades.

What this means practically now is that contemporary independent unions must still follow the basic systems and structure of the older independent industrial unions, while also creatively confronting the problem of modern labor law and state unionism. Independent unions will have to navigate and engage with the modern union certification system and contract bargaining system on their terms, in the same way shop committees in the state unionist-organized shops should engage in the grievance system on their own terms and for their own purposes. However, independent unions must avoid doing what the state unions do which is liquidate their whole union and shop forms into legalistic bargaining units. Indeed, the reverse should occur, where the bargaining committee should be a small specialized extension of a much larger non-legally recognized trade union machinery run by and based entirely on the workers themselves. Thus the union as a class organization of the proletariat must be self-reliant on the class itself, and in this way autonomous from the capitalist state, relying only on the workers themselves for its needs, producing only specialized shell organizations, representatives, or committees to engage in the modern bargaining/certification process that are all practically subordinate at all times to the larger independent union structure.

For example, the members and leadership of an independent class-conscious union might decide, after a period of theoretical and practical work that allows them to sink deep roots in a workplace, it is necessary to conduct a formal union certification election as part of winning a written contract. After securing victory, the state unionist rules will require certain documents and representatives to be presented and recognized by the state for the certification to occur. The shop committees, the shop paper, the actual union leadership structures, the internal dues system, the internal and external support networks—all of this should and must remain independent in order for the union to preserve its self-reliance, in order for it engage with the bosses and owners on its terms and not the capitalist state's. This way, even if the owners or state dangle threats like de-certification over the heads of the workers in order to make them submit, it will not matter. The actual trade union structure and workers' network is insulated, and if attacked, can simply adapt and re-emerge again to continue the fight. Labor law also prohibits many other principles of class-conscious trade unionism, like industrial unionism, which is essentially impossible if you are “playing by the rules” given the context of solidarity strike bans and company-specific collective bargaining agreements. This makes creative solutions to the problem of forming independent working-class unionism all the more vital at the current moment.

Industrial Unionism. The union organizations that the class-conscious workers and their shop apparatuses (shop committees, shop papers, worker circles) seek to form are fundamentally different in scope and jurisdiction than the old narrow craft unions or the modern legalistic state unions/labor NGOs. Simply put, craft unionism means only organizing in the interests of small divided segments of workers. State unionism was built on the base of old capitalist craft unionism and was then combined with a huge bureaucratic legal apparatus which codified this system and tied it to the imperialist state. This is how we have ended up in a situation where within the same building, a company's maintenance workers and drivers might be organized by the Teamsters (in separate bargaining units of course!), the office staff by the Office and Professional Employees International Union, and the actual shop floor workers by whatever is the dominant union in their sector (UAW, SEIU, NEA, etc.). And all three unions don't work with each other on anything except keeping workers' militancy down and political lobbying. In contrast to this sorry state of affairs, the Trade Union Unity League, one of only two actual industrial union centers in our country's history (the other being the original Industrial Workers of the

World (IWW), explained the purpose and background of industrial unionism in a very straightforward way:

“The great consolidation of the forces of capitalism makes industrial unionism imperative for a fighting labor movement. Craft unionism, born in the early stages of capitalism, is worthless in these days of monopoly capitalist organization. In trustified industries, where 90 per cent of the workers can learn their “trades” in a week, organization by craft is criminal betrayal of the workers. Even in those industries which are more competitive in character, such as textile, needle, mining, etc., the great banks exert the controlling force, and make necessary an all-inclusive, militant, industrial unionism. Only by great mass movements, drawing in all the workers, and capable of paralyzing whole industries and groups of industries, can the workers make headway against the powerful employers, who are aided by the state and their fascist labor leader allies. The A. F. of L. craft system of one or more “trades” striking while the rest remain at work is a crime against the working class. It must be utterly wiped out (*The Trade Union Unity League: Its Program, Structure, Methods and History*).”

Thus the unionism the class-conscious workers build stretches across demographics, individual buildings, crafts, or other artificial divisions, encompasses the needs and demands of all workers in a given sector or large national enterprise, and keeps in mind the perspective and interests of the working class as a whole. In this way, industrial unionism also implied coordination between sectors and industries, making national coordinating bodies like the New Labor Organizing Committee a theoretical and practical necessity for all workers who desire a real independent and combative industrial unionism.

It is Right to Rebel. Another term historically for the class-conscious unionist movement was “class struggle unionism”. That is because trade unionism is first and foremost about the struggle of the class of wage laborers (workers) against the class of owners (capitalists), as embodied in the slogan of our movement “*class against class*”. The interests of the working class are diametrically opposed to the interests of the capitalist class, who have stolen and maintain control over the vast majority of the country’s, and indeed the world’s, wealth through vast systems of exploitation and oppression. On a day-to-day level, this means that the unions of our class mobilize, organize and politicize the workers on a shop-, company-, industry-, or nation-wide scale to fight for their political and economic demands at the point of production, and in society at large. On a longer-term time scale, this means that the class-conscious trade union organizations have a different outlook than their state or business union counterparts. The class-conscious unions are patient, and take a long-term view on all of our actions and campaigns, understanding that the ultimate goal is the revolutionary seizure of political power for the workers, an establishment of a workers state (the dictatorship of the proletariat), and the construction of a classless society free of oppression and exploitation. This means that while we are not slow-moving, we also do not sacrifice the long-term interests of the workers for short-term gains (i.e. opportunism), and we do not justify such betrayals with false theories and incorrect analysis (i.e. revisionism). The class conscious workers and their unions manifest the principle of “it is right to rebel” in every sense: they rebel by fighting for the short-term demands of our class everyday, and they rebel by fighting to make revolution over the medium- and long-term, thus achieving the historic and essential demands of our class.

Now is a time for great experimentation, as the class-conscious union movement is finally getting off its feet and transitioning from a period of propaganda circles and disorganized practical work to actual trade union organizations and coordinated practical work. This transition is embodied in the emergence

of New Labor, which seeks to reconstitute an independent, class-conscious and combative trade unionism in the United States. However this experimentation must occur within the principles of our class, as outlined above and throughout this guide as whole, in order for this our work to not become its opposite and for us to avoid tomorrow becoming the very sell-outs, traitors and opportunists that we fight against today.

The greatest tool the class-conscious trade union organizations have in their arsenal is that of the strike. In the field of labor, on a fundamental level implementing the principle of “it is right to rebel” means being able to withhold the labor power wage-workers sell to the owners to survive, labor which is the basis of the profits, and thus the wealth, that the capitalists hoard and their imperialist governments protect. The capitalists and their state unionist agents have done everything in their power to weaken and limit the right of workers to strike because they know its power, and know that if used alongside other great tools and weapons of the working class, the strike can play a key role in not just achieving the economic demands of the workers, but also their political demands as well. In this way, class-conscious unionism must always look to find creative ways to leverage the labor power of the workers to carry out the goals and aims of a given organizing campaign or sequence of mass work. Whether it be a traditional strike, a slowdown, work-to-rule, a secondary strike, a walkout, etc., the most powerful tool at the organized workers’ disposal is their ability to collectively withhold and control their labor power, which if used wisely and strategically can be used again and again in diverse settings to rebel against exploitation and oppression and win the demands of the workers, as well as assist in achieving the aims of the working class as a whole.

B) In a State Union-Organized Shop

When organizing within an already existing state union collective bargaining unit, or within an already existing semi-independent union, class-conscious workers will find they have to engage in what is called “opposition work”. Why “opposition”? Because the workers in the workplaces already “organized” by the state unions *oppose* the false union leadership these sell-outs represent, and reject their methods of work and their union with the capitalists and the capitalist state. The workers in these shops yearn for a class-conscious unionism, like that outlined above, and must be mobilized and organized around the tasks of re-constituting actual trade union machinery in their workplaces and breaking with the state union leadership, their dead-end plans, and their false structures.

When talking about the oppositional work of revolutionaries, which is referred to as fractional work, the comrades in the Communist Party of India (Maoist) write that:

“[...] the important point in fractional work is the skillful exposure of the reactionaries and reformists leading or participating within these organizations. This exposure is essential to draw the masses away from their influence. This must however be done without exposing ourselves to the enemy. The forms of exposure will thus differ depending upon the concrete situation... There are two types of deviations in fractional work. One is to sink to the level of the reactionaries and reformists leading the organization and refuse to do any political work in the name of having a long-term approach and preventing exposure. The other is to get rapidly exposed due to our desire to achieve 'quick results'. Both deviations should be avoided [*Urban Perspective*].”

The two main types of deviations, or errors, our Indian comrades talk about can be seen all the time in what passes for modern-day “revolutionary labor organizing.” Of the two deviations, the first is

definitely the most common. Many “radical workers” think that by just doing normal organizing work for the state union, the same way a professional staffer would but unpaid, they are successfully doing oppositional work because the whole time they are expanding and organizing the state union they secretly have “revolutionary” beliefs in their head. While these comrades convince themselves they are somehow “outsmarting”, “taking advantage of”, or “transforming” the class-collaborationist state unions they work within, in reality they are being played by the corrupt and useless state union leadership which counts on new energetic “radical” workers to do their dirty work for them.

Reactionary sell-out labor leaders have already exposed this practice themselves a thousand times before, but still new revolutionary workers continue to make the same mistake over and over again. For example, in the 1930s, when the opportunist and corrupt leader of the United Mine Workers (UMW) John L. Lewis was asked by reporters why he was hiring openly communist workers to organize for his new union center the Committees of Industrial Organization (CIO), he famously responded: “Who gets the bird? The hunter or the dog?” In order to be “the hunter” and not “the dog” in this situation, class-conscious trade union organizations must always have a strong set of pre-established and agreed upon principles, plans, goals, and strategies when they engage in union opposition work. They must always take a stand against collaboration with the capitalists, their politicians, and their agents among the workers. They must make sure that their organization knows what it is doing, what it has to avoid, and is, to put it bluntly, in the drivers seat and not the other way around. For example, oppositional work does not look like having all your members run in union officer elections in order to “win leadership and decision-making power within the union.” This is an electoralist and conspiratorial approach to oppositional work that stands in contrast to an authentic class-struggle and mobilization/politicization-based approach. As a basic rule, working-class leadership and decision-making power are always won on the shop floor, in the buildings and among the workers through struggle, raising consciousness, and trust, not by gaining titles and formal offices within the state unions.

The shop committees and shop papers which make up the union opposition should maintain their own separate collective leadership, and should always differentiate themselves from establishment union leadership and professional union organizers through their political line, their close relationship with their co-workers, their methods of work, their goals, vision, and their skillful exposure of the reactionaries and reformists leading or participating within these organization. In the state unions, shop committees should prepare the organizational basis for the future independent class-conscious proletarian-led unions that will come following the inevitable split with the state unionist centers. In the semi-independent and independent business unions, shop committees should consolidate, advance and expand the left-line within them in order to seize and transform these pseudo-independent unions into actual class-conscious revolutionary unions. In all contexts, through their oppositional work shop committees in these contexts should seek to build up and establish the embryo of what is called the “united proletarian front,” which is essentially a united front of workers which will help defend, fight for, and advance the interests of the working class and her allies in all sectors of the economy and all parts of the country. To do this, shop committees must promote, prepare, expand and win leadership of concrete actions of class struggle (strikes, slowdowns, walkouts, workplace rallies etc.), take those struggles to their conclusion without betraying the workers, and at the same time make effective use of their existing shop paper mechanisms to engage the workers politically and help consolidate the advanced among them which emerge over the course of struggle.

Because of the many complications and considerations of union oppositional work, the shop floor organizations operating in legally-recognized bargaining units have an added layer of complexity in their work. The problem these shop floor organizations face is that they must contend directly with the state unions for leadership of the workers in a way that does not cut them off from the bulk of the

workers who may identify their privileges with the state union. The shop paper must not let itself be turned into an appendage of the state union through obsessively publicizing every internal development. The shop paper must be a master of differentiating between essential and unessential. The things that directly impact the workers, such as agreements made on their behalf, factionalism against them participating in union affairs, political donations and irresponsible use of dues money, lax contract enforcement, etc, are important. The shop paper is supposed to be an organ of the workers, so it should only mention state union actions in the context of their impact on the workers.

At the same time, the shop committees in these contexts should not shy away from participating in the state union on its own terms. If the workers are filing grievances, try to give it specific direction, turn it into a mass grievance campaign, and expose the state union officials when they negate the grievances in favor of the company. Put forward contract proposals and expose those officials who put their own arbitrary standards above the interests of the workers. Explain the objective harm their agreements do to the workers and use this as a basis for organizing workers outside the state unions. Participation in the state unions should always be undertaken on the basis of independent workers' power with the intention of building it up further. The shop committee can never be an appendage of or a caucus within the state unions—this is the first step to outright liquidation of the workers' collective strength, which is based in the production process.

The basis of the state unions is integration into the bureaucratic state apparatus (not organizing) and they operate along bureaucratic (not democratic) lines. Consequently, shop committee activity within them and collaboration with them has a hard limit. The opposition's shop committees, in their day-to-day functioning, basically have to pretend the state unions do not exist, because from the standpoint of the workers and their political interests they might as well not exist when the state unions make it their primary job to enforce their terrible contracts and cut deals with capitalists and politicians.

Conclusion

Every workplace organizer must start with careful study of their workplace, its day-to-day functioning. They must simultaneously construct a theoretically sound press organ and administratively consistent shop-floor machinery and the two must be mutually reinforcing. They must not lose sight of the ultimate aim of the labor movement, the dictatorship of the proletariat, and they must not lose sight of the immediate needs of the unorganized non-communist masses. Unity and solidarity are meaningless slogans if they are not backed with ironclad discipline, correct class politics, and clearly-defined plans supported and executed by the workers themselves. It is not enough to denounce the politics and practice of the state unions. A real break with the state unions means breaking with the entire framework of NGO-style labor work and “returning” to the shop-floor and building up workers power there. This means the construction of mass organizations capable of exerting the collective power of the workers, combining these organizations with revolutionary theory, and ruthless struggle against all opportunist elements (especially the “left” ones) for the purpose of establishing the iron unity and discipline needed for the final victory of the workers over the bourgeoisie.