



unions against
revolution g.
munis and j.
zerzan

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an introduction

What interest do these essays hold for a new generation of malcontents, surrounded as we are by well-meaning leftist activists and aspiring union organizers? Taking the long view, it's hard to believe that a slim collection of this kind still runs roughshod over the sacred cows of (what passes for) the "anarchist" circles on this continent. But each new show of support for a Chavez regime, every cry of jubilee for a legislative "victory", every desperate prayer for a techno-fix that passes the lips of every faithful progressive shows that even something so cursory as a critique of union organization is still anathema. So here we find ourselves, risking the stale routine of reprinting a classic, one whose rather basic (and occasionally limited) outlines are still contentious and confounding. It is in the spirit of addressing this, as well as pissing off the faithful, that we present this edition.

When *Black and Red*--the publishing house of Lorraine and Fredy Perlman--first released its handsome edition of *Unions Against Revolution* in 1975, it's possible that they'd have hoped such a pamphlet would not remain a necessary corrective a full 35 years later. Oh, how hopelessly domesticated things have become.

The title essay by G. Munis was written in 1960 (and reprinted after the events of May 1968 in Paris) and as such, is a relatively early contemporary voice of what would eventually become a more widespread--and certainly more total--critique of unions and their conciliatory function; their *domestication of revolt*. The likes of such a critique is obviously as old as the presence of those who refuse to be recuperated, massified, enumerated and pacified, and has been expressed in various ways since then. It was enunciated later and more unceremoniously in the pages of Jean Weir's UK anarchist journal from the 1980s, *Insurrection*,¹ for example, and since has been found in milieus as diverse as anti-state communism and the anti-civilization currents of anarchy.

But before this seemingly inevitable flowering of doubt and this beautiful and persistent questioning turned its gaze toward *formal organization* itself, there was Munis with this somewhat limited, but occasionally far-reaching essay. For us, Munis' best moments include the thorough demolition job against Leninism-Stalinism and state-capitalist monopoly, as well as insights such as this: "The elimination of the bourgeoisie does not in any way mean the elimi-

1 Contact Hit The Bricks distro or visit <http://www.325.nostate.net> for the complete set of *Insurrection* issues #0-6 and other publications illuminating alternatives to formal organization and traditional structures advanced by the left, etc.

nation of capital or the proletariat,” here making clear (in common with writers like Jacques Camatte) that the universalization of the proletarian condition--working class identity--does not mean an end to the nightmare, but a perpetuation of it. On a related note, the break-up and decentralization of the productive process, once considered a radical demand, is now accomplished by capital itself, as the formerly identifiable and attackable puppet masters vanish more and more completely behind the smoke screens and funhouse mirrors of spectacular society and its increasingly auto-piloted existence.

For a window into some of the shortcomings of the piece, see Judith Allen’s rejoinder. Allen’s response is commendable, but perhaps not severe enough: after all, we couldn’t give a fuck less about demands for a shorter work day or whatever other cries for concessions one might make audible to power while the world burns. And not only because Munis has spent the whole essay seemingly rejecting this reformism or because of our “unrealistic” (read: sinful) insistence that Work and Time must be undone, their logic challenged in every instance; but more immediately because we find Munis’ whole framework--in which he clarifies a way to a socialist future and speaks of “the unlimited horizons of a new civilization”--disgusting at best. The regularity and predictability of assaults on the natural world as well as on our own wholeness as individuals in the name of production society more than adequately attests to the horrible character of the capitalist/socialist mode of being, of *industry*, even in its council communist or whatever-the-fuck other forms. The bottom line is that a far more total criticism of the union orientation is possible, not the least element of which is that a revolution along syndicalist lines would leave us impoverished of vitality, shackled to the prevailing program of domestication (endless meetings for the rest of your life, anyone?), and would leave in place all of the colonialist structures that make possible the necessary vampiric transfer of “resources” to keep the shit-show running on Time. Contrary to the hopefuls at AK press, these contradictions have not been worked out by the social ecologists a la Bookchin. Sorry, try again.

With Zerzan, we are on surer footing. Here, presented as the second full essay, is *Organized Labor Versus “The Revolt Against Work.”* A bare-bones, no bullshit piece in which the widespread discontent, rage, heartbreak, humiliation and violence of the work world is masterfully distilled into an essay that demonstrates the worker’s rejection of control as exercised not only by the bosses, but by the union hacks as well. Furthermore, this is only one of a handful of Zerzan’s early “labor studies” essays with a historical orientation (most of which were written while he was still emerging from the thrall of the union form--having belonged to a radical union himself--and most of which were collected later in his first book *Elements of Refusal*). Some might argue that this is JZ at his best: meeting the workerist nonsense on its own terrain while suffering less significantly from what some see as the problems afflicting his more speculative/visionary writing (though we like that stuff too.)

One thing is clear: our capacity to liberate ourselves is contingent upon our ability to abandon the fantasies of false opposition.

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Further Reading:

The Reproduction of Daily Life by Fredy Perlman, *Worker-Student Action Committees, France May 1968* by Fredy Perlman and Roger Gregoire, *Lip and the Self-Managed Counter-Revolution*. All published by Black and Red, whose entire catalogue is worth checking out.

Elements of Refusal by John Zerzan

Anarchy After Leftism by Bob Black

Beyond Bookchin: Preface for a Future Social Ecology by David Watson

This World We Must Leave and Other Essays by Jacques Camatte

unions against revolution

g. munis

No contradiction can exist between the economic and the political aspects of a revolutionary conception, even supposing the clearest organic and functional demarcation between them. The same is true for any reactionary conception. Hence the present inter-penetration, the agreement and collaboration between unions--economic organs and political parties' ideological organs--gives us the key to understanding both, from whichever side one looks at the matter. This statement proceeds from an old and unalterable principle, more than proven by reason and verified by men in the course of a thousand years' experience: every idea or political action arises from an economic foundation which then plays both a controlling and determining role. In the course of this work we will examine, under different aspects, the inter-penetration of politics and economics and evaluate unions by taking a look at how they presently function.

Unions first appeared as defensive organs of the working class, faced with subhuman conditions of work, presenting themselves, on the industrial plane, as extensions of the old brotherhoods and corporations. On the basis of their aspirations unions do not even reach the level of reformism. Reformism, utilizing ideological and economic analyses, claims to demonstrate that, by means of capitalist democracy, it would be possible to attain socialism through a legal evolution and without any need for revolutionary acts. For unions there was never a question of either evolution or revolution, still less of socialism. Unions go no further than attempting to obtain, for the exploited worker, conditions of labor which are less intolerable and less humiliating, but also, as time has demonstrated, more profitable for capital. In spite of this limitation the early unions were organs which, if not revolutionary, at least had a working class spirit and a sound composition compared to the corruption and false class character of today's unions.

At the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century a so-called revolutionary unionism (syndicalism) appeared. This was an eclectic doctrine adapted to the situation then

prevailing, drawn from the Marxist conception, the so-called a-politicism of anarchism, and the strictly economic claims made by the old trade unions. There is no paradox in the fact that the period of the greatest influence and the strongest thrust of this type of unionism coincided with the apogee of reformism.

Sorel and Bernstein, besides being contemporaries, had more points in common than differences. While Sorel offered, in syndicalism, the panacea to the problems of historical development, Bernstein and his tendency saw in parliamentarism, and even in the necessities of capital accumulation, the happy mechanism of a certain and harmonious evolution towards socialist society. In reality revolutionary syndicalism and reformism were united by the same bonds to the formidable economic drive of the bourgeoisie. This was the period in which the bourgeoisie attained the zenith of its civilizing possibilities, granting the greatest amount of liberty and illusions to those who, without completely escaping its ideo-economic complex, leaned to the left. For this reason the political bankruptcy of 1914 would carry with it the syndicalists and reformists. Even the Spanish C.N.T. was not an exception, although the military neutrality of Spain spared it the capitulatory phrases and attitudes of the French C.G.T.; its particular bankruptcy, as we will see later, took place at the moment of the proletarian revolution in 1936-1939.

The numerical strength and the social weight of the unions has' grown continually since 1914 and if in some countries, like France, their numerical strength has considerable diminished in the course of the last few years their importance has continued to grow. It has been said that the disaster of 1914 was necessary for the unions to really come into their own. This is because until that time capitalism feared the unions as a destructive force and had not yet seen--except perhaps in England the collaborative role that unions could play. But since the end of the first world war numerous experiences of "worker's control" in the factories have surprised the capitalists by their satisfactory effects. "Worker's control" has attenuated the struggle of workers against capital, facilitating the operation of the factories and above all increasing output. The unions stood out not only as defenders of the fatherland--that specifically capitalist entity--but as effective collaborators in the mechanism of exploitation itself. That made their fortune and opened as yet unsuspected horizons to them. However, it was during the years 1936-1937--years which for many reasons were a very important landmark in the history of the international workers' movement that the unions took on their definitive orientation. In this period they displayed the qualities thanks to which they have become one of the most solid pillars of capitalist society.

Twenty years separated the Russian and the Spanish revolutions, which were the first and the last explosions of the same offensive of the world proletariat against capitalism, an offensive marked by incessant attacks in many other countries. Meanwhile the Stalinist bureaucracy had completed the construction of state capitalism and just at the moment when the Spanish revolution was in full swing the Stalinists got rid of all those who were really communists with guns and slander. This was to modify in a decisive manner all the organic factors of the class struggle and corrupt all the ideological factors. For a long time Russian intervention in the

international workers' movement had been negative; in Spain the Russian-controlled Communist Party, dragged along by the requirements of its own preservation, turned out to be the principal counterrevolutionary police force. In July 1936 it attempted-happily in vain to prevent the uprising of the proletariat which destroyed the army throughout most of the country. In May 1937 this same Communist Party would machine gun the proletariat, which was revolting against the C.P.'s reactionary policies, defeat it, disarm it and crush the revolution. What the military had failed to do in 1936, Stalinism accomplished 10 months later.

For the first time Moscow acted, outside its own territory, directly as a counter-revolutionary force. Up to now there has been no real appreciation of the immense reactionary consequences of this event. Yet this was the source of all the acts of world importance which followed: from the Hitler-Stalin pact and the second "great war" till the policy of "peaceful coexistence" and uprisings such as those in East Germany, Poland and Hungary. The latter must be situated, not on the level of the revolt of the Spanish proletariat of May 1937, but at the most on the same level as the July 1936 insurrection, this time with the Stalinist army and police in place of Franco's army. Imre Nagy and his friends were in Hungary what the popular front was in Spain in 1936: the by-product of a revolutionary upheaval but not the core of the revolution.

It is significant that it was around 1936 that the unions revealed all their latent characteristics, incontestably manifesting themselves as auxiliary organs of capital. That in such a development it was Stalinism which won for itself the greatest influence in the unions--with the exception of the English and American trade unions--is quite natural. The economic empiricism of capitalism found in Russian counter-revolutionary empiricism a higher political expression, one which inspired it and perfected it at the same time. Both of these elements were mixed and merged to create a more favorable milieu. Now this milieu exists under a more or less completed form: it is nothing other than capitalism at its present stage, taking each country, including the "backward" ones, not as an isolated case but as part of the world system.

We will look at the Western bloc which prides itself on its democracy and more concretely on its right to strike. In reality this right is given not to the workers but to the representatives which the law recognizes them as having: the unions. Every strike launched by the workers themselves has to face a coalition of state and unions which seeks to smash it--sometimes by the direct defeat of the workers, sometimes by making the workers accept arbitration. Since the French revolutionary strike of 1936 was smashed by the Communist party (Thorez: "One must know how to end a strike") and the Socialist party together (the Blum government and police commanded by "socialists") almost every country has known strikes led to defeat by the unions because they ran counter to their economic and political interests. Thus, the strike has been in fact and in law taken over by the unions. But that is not all. Beyond the always exceptional situation of a strike, in the day-to-day relations between capital and labor--which is where the class struggle is forged--the unions appear not only as buffers between the two camps, but as messengers from capital to labor and as agents who help to adapt labor to the requirements of capital. All the natural manifestations of the struggle of labor against capital,

once monopolized by the unions, are turned against the worker for the benefit of capital.

We have only to recall certain facts to see that the above line of reasoning is undeniable. Factory committees¹ as well as delegates from departments, shops or occupational categories are not the expression of the free will of the workers, whatever may be the mode of their election, depending on the country. They represent the unions, within which workers are not free to elect anyone they want: even the famous British shop stewards need the assent of the trade unions. In most countries the law has decided that the unions which it recognizes represent the working class. The workers therefore no longer have the right to represent themselves as they see fit, still less to create organs other than unions in order to direct their struggles and to deal with the employers or the state. The rights of the working class and the rights of the unions are manifestly two distinct and contradictory things. Because of this the opposition between the workers and the factory committees or departmental delegates--an opposition which is always present in a latent form--sharpens whenever there is a conflict with the employer and becomes a direct encounter if the struggle broadens. In the course of the last twenty years every strike which deserves the name has had to be called against the will of the unions and by outflanking its representatives in the factories; the workers themselves have had to elect strike committees. However, every time that these strike committees or factory assemblies, elected by the workers, have allowed themselves to be influenced by the union leaders, capital has gained the upper hand.

The goal of collective labor contracts was to limit the arbitrariness of the employers in various areas: working conditions and the length of the working day, intensity of exploitation (hourly productivity), wage range by category (hierarchical relations), hiring and layoffs, political rights, freedom of speech and assembly within the factories, factory regulations, etc. However, collective contracts have become, in the hands of the unions, who alone under the law have the right to negotiate and sign them, a formidable instrument for the subjugation of the proletariat to capital in general and to the unions in particular. Indeed, unions have become, at present, partially or totally, agents of exploitation. Layoffs and hiring are most often entrusted to the mercy of capital, except in the case of closed shops, which far from guaranteeing work for the laborers, simply grants the right of adjudication to the unions. This is reactionary economic coercion of the worst sort, as we will see below when we discuss unions in the Eastern zone.

Labor contracts sanction and encourage the division of the working class into hierarchical groups opposed to one another because of differences in wages and the prejudices attached to the category and technical function of the worker. The unions instinctively, by their very nature, contribute to the division of the proletariat on a hierarchical basis, except for which the proletariat would form a compact bloc against capital. The necessity of dividing the proletariat through hierarchical work relations, and of thus alienating it from its highest interest, is as important for the unions as it is for capital. For a century the workers' movement fought

1 Here Munis is referring to organs which are part and parcel of the union apparatus and not autonomous factory committees.

against hierarchical relations within its midst, and in large part it destroyed prejudices in favor of hierarchy while limiting its material bases. In the course of the last few decades the unions and their political inspirers have succeeded in largely re-establishing hierarchical prejudices and greatly increasing the number of work categories. Most workers today, even the worst off, think that hierarchical work relations are natural and “just.”

Lastly, if the original idea of collective contracts was to put a curb on the arbitrariness of capital while awaiting its complete suppression, today they constitute an almost perfect way to regulate the capitalist system in accordance with its functional requirements. In negotiating and signing collective contracts the unions behave as if they were an integral part of the groups who monopolize the means of production. In the United States and in other countries, many unions are important shareholders in the companies which exploit their own members; which, far from prefiguring a socialist society, transforms the union into a beneficiary of exploitation in the fullest economic and ideological sense of the term. Where the unions do not actually participate in drawing up plans for the exploitation of the workers they seek this right.

The work place, the large factories in particular, which are the scene of the class struggle, afford the most revolutionary workers a permanent and far-reaching practical and ideological activity. But this activity is made impossible by the unions. Frequently collective contracts stipulate that political propaganda and activity within the factory are prohibited, not to speak of discussions and meetings which are indispensable to any working class activity. For many years the unions have conspired with the employers every time there was a question of dismissing revolutionary workers. Such dismissals are now legitimized by a written clause in collective contracts or surreptitiously acknowledged, since they are covered by the rules made by the employers in all the factories. The unions and their political inspirers have undertaken the task of acting as policemen against those who distribute revolutionary literature, when necessary beating them up. In Italy, the Stalinist union leaders have granted to the employers the right to fire, without notice or compensation, workers guilty of distributing literature or any type of agitation.² In France, most of the factory rules permit as much and the restrictions on thought go so far that even the most rebellious workers are afraid to express themselves and so keep quiet. The situation is no better in Germany, England or the U.S., no more than in Russia or Spain. Thus, thanks to the convergent action of capital and the union organisations, the working class finds itself reduced to clandestinity even at the work place, which is where it is exploited and fucked over.

The proletariat must recover its political freedom, which is impossible without throwing the present employer-union legal framework overboard. The complete freedom of people with respect to the exercise of their labor contains, in embryo, the future revolutionary democracy and communism. We say communism because those who today call themselves communists are not communists at all and through legitimate revulsion towards them, those who really are communists often avoid claiming the name.

2 A worker reading l’Unita, the Stalinist newspaper, inside the factory is dismissed without a hearing, with the agreement of the Stalinist leaders who have co-signed this clause.

In the strictly economic domain the situation of the working class was never worse than it is today. Everything said to the contrary '5 50 much bullshit. The eight-hour day, which should have been replaced long ago by a four or five hour day, now exists only on paper. In many countries the refusal to work overtime is an immediate cause for dismissal. Everywhere the introduction of so-called "basepay" (norm in Russia) which is deliberately kept low, and rewards and bonuses based on productivity, etc., not only forces the worker to accept, "of his own accord," working days of ten to twelve hours but in fact abolishes daily or hourly wages by imposing anew the vilest of all types of labor piece-work. Since its inception the workers movement has endeavored to put an end to this oldest of all forms of exploitation, which Physically exhausts the worker and dulls him intellectually.

It succeeded in eliminating piece-work in most of Europe. Even twenty years ago most workers considered it demeaning to accept piece-work of any kind. Today, however, piece-work is again the rule, less because capital has imposed it than through the deceit of the unions: in fact we have here a proof of the ultimate affinity of unions and capital.

With respect to the most profound aspect of exploitation, productivity per person and hour, the proletariat finds itself forced into a terrible situation. The production that is extracted from it each day increases at an enormous rate. First, technical innovations take away from the worker any creative intervention in his labor, measure his movements to the second and transform him into a living robot subjected to the same rhythm as the machines. Then, time studies, that atrocious and repugnant snare, force people to work over and over with the same tools and during uniform periods of time. Finally, the discipline of each enterprise reduces to a minimum the slightest suspicious of work even the lighting of a cigarette or taking a shit. The output that is extracted from each person by these means is enormous and so, in the same proportion, is the worker's physical and psychic exhaustion.

To mention this problem is to put one's finger on the evil of modern society and of the unions which are part of it. Moreover, there is no way to resolve these problems without overthrowing the present relation³ between production and distribution, in short, without making the revolution. But in order to treat this question properly it is necessary to first of all see what unions represent in Russia which is the model that the whole Eastern bloc, and even many countries beyond it, must imitate.

Everything that has been said about the reactionary work of unions and the deterioration of the proletarian condition in the West is even more true for the Russian world. Ever since, under Stalin's aegis, state capitalism was established in Russia, the whole of the old bourgeois world has been learning lessons in exploitation from it. These pertain to police repression too, but here we will limit ourselves to speaking about the specific relations between capital and labor and the role of the unions. Thus, if unions in general have, everywhere and for a long time, been a complementary force to capital within the working class, the Stalinist counter-revolution, by giving unions a very strong push in this direction and by providing them with a tempting example, has disclosed the intrinsic destiny of unions. Almost all the measures which,

3 Between instruments of labor and wage labor.

since 1936, have aggravated the exploitation of the proletariat in the West and heightened its objectification, have their model in Stalinist Russia.

The complete suppression of political rights and the right to hold meetings inside or outside the factory; overtime imposed by the employer or the inadequate base pay (norm) for the official working day; fines and disciplinary measures at the discretion of the employer, who also dictates the factory rules; time studies and innumerable controls, piecework, hierarchical divisions within the proletariat based on wages and technical “qualifications”; collective contracts which only benefit capital, continuous increase of productivity to the detriment of the producers, prohibition of strikes in fact or by law; in short, everything which in the West transforms the union organizations into more and more negative institutions received a strong impetus from the Russia of the 1930’s and was to inspire capital and unions throughout the world.

It is well known, at least by those who are familiar with the situation in Russia, that economic inequality between the privileged and the exploited is greater there than anyplace else, as are the me qualities between different categories of workers. Inequality between the privileged and the exploited, which is at the same time the cause and the effect of capitalism, only concerns us in this essay as it affects the evolution and the prospects of the unions. It is sufficient to note for the moment that this inequality raises in Russia, as in every other country, the necessity for the expropriation of capital by the workers, which is impossible without an insurrection which completely demolishes the present governmental apparatus including the official party and the whole body of law.

Better than any bourgeoisie, the Stalinist bureaucracy knows how to intensify exploitation by accelerating the rhythm of labor and by introducing into the proletariat the greatest possible number of job categories. The traditional means for capitalism to “stimulate” production is to substitute for the homogeneous historical interest of the proletariat a multiplicity of heterogeneous immediate interests, which are so many obstacles to a common revolutionary activity. Once again the Russian union and political “natchalniks”⁴ have outdone their Western counterparts.⁵ In Russia the worker foremen receive a direct profit from the exploitation of their comrades in labor: the Stakhanovists receive a bonus which is proportional to the surpassing of the “norm” and to the number of workers in their team. Thus they see their wages increase by the exploitation of the common workers and are therefore led to intensify this exploitation. The Stakhanovists are therefore, still more clearly than foremen in the West (with their fixed salaries), turned into the enemies of their comrades in labor.

There is nothing astonishing in all this, since everything in Russia has been turned into its opposite. Once the revolution gave way to the counter-revolution, a capitalist dictatorship

4 A pejorative term applied by the people to the present rulers.

5 During the honeymoon of Russo-American relations, towards the end of World War II, the heads of the Yankee monopolies (including among others, Johnston, then President of the Chamber of Commerce) having been invited by Moscow to visit its industrial enterprises, lavishly praised the methods of “Soviet” exploitation that the American workers, or so they complained, prevented them from applying.

,which demagogically calls itself a proletarian dictatorship, presents-in reality imposes-as socialist the most rotten features and principles of traditional capitalism. The labor law, approved in 1939, says: The basic feature which characterizes wages in the capitalist countries is the levelling of wages between specialised and non-specialized workers. In the remuneration of labor, petit-bourgeois levelling is the worst enemy of socialism. For many years Marxism-Leninism has unceasingly fought against levelling.

For many years the Stalinists have tried to take people in by presenting industrial development through wage labor as the loyal expression of Marxist thought. Marxism, on the contrary, establishes as its objective the abolition of wage labor, and the economic leveling of society, the unlimited satisfaction of all individual needs and the greatest freedom and liberty, which is indispensable to any personal or collective fulfillment. If we do not aim at that, nothing revolutionary can be done in the present historical juncture. In the old capitalist countries wage differences within the proletariat are a condition established by the direct market relation between capital and labor. In Russia these wage differences have, by constitutional law, acquired the status of a principle and consequently it is a crime to fight against them. The traditional relation between capital and labor, which the bourgeoisie never justified as a social relation of man to man but only through the subterfuge of the sacred right of property” which in reality is turned against it when we consider as property, not the means of production or instruments of labor but everything which is necessary to the material consumption and the full psychic development of each person-is transformed in Russia into a natural and permanent relation between people having different abilities. Thus, instead of social classes or categories delimited in fact by wealth we have classes delimited by law on the basis of their talents and special functions. Nonetheless delimitation in fact on the basis of wealth takes on importance instead of losing it, Worse still the whole thing smacks of a biological justification for the exploitation of man by man.

Let us further point out that the principle object of the labor contracts imposed by the Russian unions is to put the working class at the mercy of capital, even juridically, “by guaranteeing the fulfillment and over-fulfillment of the state production plan for the given establishment.”⁶ It is a question of extracting higher and higher rates of production from labor: The main stipulation of the contracted obligation must be an increased demand from every worker. Without strengthening labor discipline and without ruthless struggle against the violators of state and labor discipline-grabbers and loafers there can be no real fulfillment of obligations laid down in the collective agreement.⁷

The very word contract is a mark of servitude for the working class. Whether collective or individual, verbal or written, “free” or imposed, the labor contract is the legal symbol of its

6 Trud, the official Russian trade union paper, Feb.19, 1947, cited by Solomon M. Schwarz, Labor in the Soviet Union, London 1952, p.280.

7 Ibid. The 1917 revolution called for the disappearance of wage labor and capital. That is why a reformist critic, Zagorsky,, defined the economy of the revolutionary epoch as “an enormous charity program... (con't on next page)

condition as a wage-slave class, to use Marx's term. This fact in itself is sufficient to expose the lies of the Russian exploiters. In a truly socialist economy neither capital nor wage labor would exist, and consequently the labor contract (the agreement for the utilization of the labor force) would disappear with the disappearance of the contracting parties. In a socialist economy, the means of production would cease to be capital and human labor power would cease to be a commodity for sale. United in one economic and social entity, they would be as free from any contractual obligations as an individual is toward himself. By its very existence, the Russian labor contract places itself within the framework of the social bonds characteristic of capitalism. But it is the "innovations" of the Russian system, particularly the completely overt way the unions assume the role of slave-drivers towards the workers, that reveal the ominous contours of a society in decline whose despots seem to be more capable than anyone else of checking proletarian resistance.

In effect, these contracts, whose main point is to extract the highest productivity possible from each worker, are drawn up by the unions and, after the formality of government approval, it is the unions duty to insure servility through promises of higher pay, by the use of threats or by turning over to legal prosecution those workers who do not go along with the demands of production. It is through union channels that the Russian government punishes, as if it were a crime, the struggle to work less and earn more ("The Right to be Lazy")⁸ which the world revolutionary movement has always considered to be a just claim of the working class and a progressive demand.

Thus in the eyes of the Russian workers the unions appear as the organization immediately responsible for their exploitation and for the cruelties characteristic of the counter-revolution. A great number of convincing documents (enough to fill several volumes) testify to this effect. It is impossible to list all of them here. One of the greatest weaknesses of the revolutionary movement, perhaps the cause of its limited support today, is the fact that it did not protest these ignominies. For the purposes of this article however it is enough to recall certain typically reactionary features of the Russian system: the laws forbidding workers to change jobs without the permission of the plant manager-laws which have long since been eliminated in older capitalist countries; laws establishing wages proportionate to the productivity of each individual worker (piece rates) not to mention bonuses for political servility; laws which punish absenteeism, lateness and other "disciplinary" infractions by fines, suspensions, firings and forced labor; laws which transform everything which revolutionary thought considers an outrage into something honourable and profitable; in short, all the laws which crush the proletariat as nowhere else are in Russia the direct work of the unions. This legislation is both proposed and carried

7 ...Beginning with the N.E.P. (New Economic Policy), there clearly began a movement in the opposite direction, which acquired the character of state capitalism with the Stalinist counter-revolution. Up to that point contracts were individual even if they were not written down. The systemization of collective contracts runs parallel to the establishment of a state capitalism which seeks stability and permanence.

8 "Le droit I' la paresse," Paul Lafargue, 1898.

out by the unions. Furthermore, the forced labor camps--"re-education" according to official jesuitry--the burial ground of workers and especially revolutionaries, the method deliberately chosen to lower wages and to be able to claim that unemployment is non-existent, are also "institutions" created on the initiative of the unions who share the advantages of this system with the state and with its essential instrument: the police.

One can argue that the Russian unions, as everyone knows, do not really act on their own initiative. But their repudiation by the workers is no less absolute. International experience indicates that unions in their structure and function vis-a-vis the working class, always contained propitious elements for their transformation into a cog in the most centralized and absolute capitalist system.

Certainly the Russian unions blindly obey the orders of the government; they are only its vulgar instruments. But their own leaders are integrated into the highest levels of the Party and the state and thus become both "co-managers" ("co-owners") of an impersonal capital and at the same time "worker" leaders. Never could a company union dream of a more complete subjugation of the workers.

In Russia today the unions' function is part and parcel of the exploitative function of capital itself. The union is at the same time boss, foreman and policeman. In each factory it represents along with managers and technicians--all of whom are distinguished members of the union and of the "Communist" cell the same thing as Hitler's confidential councils (Vertrauensrat). Furthermore, the complete intermixing of capital and Party-State has erased all trace of any union autonomy or protest activity. No one has to teach Russian workers this fact; they have cruelly suffered its consequences for many long years.

In the trajectory of Russian society, there is a definite break between the Soviet period and the period of the unions. Soviets were organizations which represented the workers, carried out their orders and those of the revolution. The unions on the other hand, are organizations of control over the workers executing the orders of the counter-revolution. The Soviets were paralyzed and finally disbanded while unions gained in importance and prerogatives as the bureaucracy increasingly revealed its counter-revolutionary nature. The proletariat was repressed to such an extent that today its subjection is nowhere as great as in Russia. Certainly it is not the unions alone which inspired the counter-revolution. They themselves are part of a whole series of bourgeois ideas and interests, vestiges from the tsarist period; its main basis was the high administrative bureaucracy, both technical and political, whose numbers and privileges have monstrously expanded. But in their turn the unions, if one prefers, their high-level leaders form an inseparable part of the whole category of state capitalists who rule the enormous corporation falsely called the "Soviet Union."

The interpenetration of the unions and the Russian counter-revolutionary bureaucracy was neither artificially imposed by the latter nor was it an accident. It is the spontaneous result of the intrinsic nature of unions from which the government assassinated or "purged" certain union leaders along with former revolutionaries.

The government eliminated them not for their union activities but for their communist

attitude, either real or imagined. Because of their adaptive powers, the unions conformed perfectly to the specific aims and routine functioning of the counter-revolution. To understand this clearly, it suffices to examine the nature of unions.

Unions are totally inconceivable without the existence of wage-labor, which in turn presupposes the existence of capital. As long as capital is held by individual owners engaged in competition and represented by many individuals and parties in the government, unions are at least able to bargain for an improvement in the conditions of labor exploitation. Their function is to regularize the sale of labor power, a function which has become indispensable to the modern capitalist system. From this fact comes their importance as complementary structures of the state, if not part of the state itself, everywhere in the world today. But this very function, which in the past allowed unions to at least serve as instruments of the working class was also a narrowness indicating their limitations and reactionary future. Their existence as an organization is entirely dependent on the continued existence of the labor/capital duality. They would be immediately eliminated by the destruction of this duality. However, they can side with capital as much as they choose without destroying this duality. On the contrary, they become increasingly indispensable to the maintenance of the capitalist system. As a result, the more gigantic and anonymous the concentration of capital, the more the unions take the side of capital and consider their role to be directly determined by the great “national” interest. Even Stalinist union leaders in the West, agents of Russian imperialism, are careful to present their union policies as an element of national welfare. They are not lying; their only future is to establish themselves as the firmest bastion of statified capital.

All unions without exception are in the process of changing from the stage of “free competition” between the supply and demand of labor power between the working class and the bourgeois into the stage of the control of the supply by the demand: that is, the control of workers by monopolistic or state capital. In most cases the unions already participate, directly or indirectly, in the profits of capitalism or else they sense the opportunity to do so.⁹ In Russia this evolution was completed with the counter-revolutionary transformation of the country in general. The law bestows on the unions all power over the working class without leaving the smallest possibility for workers, collectively or individually to discuss, accept or reject the conditions of their exploitation. All working conditions--even what the workers should think--are directly dictated by the unions in the name of capital. As always, economics and politics intertwine and end up united in the most strict absolutism.

The historical examples of a truly working-class unionism were all the results of revolutionaries’ activities and belong to an age (which ended with the Spanish Revolution) which

⁹ The possible exceptions to this trend do not fundamentally weaken the above argument. It should be noted that the “exceptions” are not to be found in underdeveloped countries but more likely in the older countries of Europe. In underdeveloped countries, where unions are or seem to be new developments, they voluntarily accept being in the service of the bourgeoisie or the state. Often different unions in the same trade engage in cut-throat competition to offer their manpower to the bosses at the cheapest rate.

allowed a certain margin for the class struggle within capitalism. But today revolutionaries who stubbornly persist in regarding unions as any sort of advantage for the future of socialism are condemning themselves to ineffectiveness or worse: betrayal. The past struggles of French, Spanish, or Italian syndicalism were the rest of the activity of revolutionary tendencies, either Marxist or anarchist. The Spanish CNT would have been nothing without the FAI (Iberian Anarchist Federation) and it is the FAI itself which must be held responsible for the reactionary alliance with Stalinism during the Civil War. The year 1936 marks the bankruptcy of Spanish syndicalism comparable (in all ways) to the bankruptcy of the French CGT in 1914. Not only did the FAI-CNT voluntarily submit to Stalinism (a submission presented, as usual, in the interests of “national welfare”) but it established an alliance with the leaders of the reformist UGT, an alliance which would have meant, in explicit enough terms, state capitalism. The CNT will never pick itself up after such a fall. Any revolutionary group coming from these roots must seek other horizons.

The collectivist experiences in Spain were only syndicalist by default. This movement was set off by the impetus of revolutionary militants and by highly radicalized sections of the masses; the unions found themselves faced with a *fait accompli*. The same can be said of the uprising against the military on July 19, 1936 and of the magnificent insurrection of May, 1937. When, after revolutionary action, the unions intervene and take over, the entire process is reversed: the activity of the proletariat and the participation of revolutionaries recedes and retreats—the prelude to defeat. In the same vein, the experiences of the strike in Nantes¹⁰ in 1956 should be remembered. The strike, the work of several revolutionary militants in the local union, was betrayed by the national union. Hundreds of similar examples can be found in any country in the world. Attempts to give unions a revolutionary content, through the use of internal oppositional caucuses or even by creating completely new unions, are doomed to failure. The only result of such “tactics” is to demoralize the revolutionary experience of those who attempt it or to turn them into simple bureaucrats. Unions bring to bear all the powerful, deformative forces of capitalist society which constantly eat away at men, changing and destroying even the best of them. There is about as much possibility of “changing” unions in a revolutionary direction as there is of “changing” capitalist society in general; unions use men for their own particular ends but men will never be able to make unions serve a revolutionary goal; they must destroy them.

Attempts to “change” unions are futile even from a practical point of view. In most countries workers are no longer in unions. Even if they still carry a union card in their pocket, whether voluntarily or because the law forces them to do so, the suspicion and disgust they feel for unions is no less strong. In countries which have had the most extensive experience with unions, workers have recourse to unions only if they feel that their “rights” under capitalist law are being flagrantly violated. This is a tedious formality but necessary, on the same level as going to the police when something is stolen. But everyone knows it is useless to go to unions to get something outside the limits of capitalist “law” because unions are a part of that law.

10 One of the most significant strikes in France during the 50's.

Consequently, we see, in many cases, a decline in the number of union members and a general desertion from union meetings by the majority of workers. Unions, having a bureaucratic and legal life of their own, merely use the working class as a docile mass to manipulate in order to increase their own power as a legal institution in our society. Unions and working people have completely different daily lives and motivations. Any "tactical" work within unions, even if guided by the purest intentions, will impede the self-activity of the exploited class, destroying their fighting spirit and barring the way to revolutionary activity.

Lenin and Trotsky's position on revolutionary work within unions is entirely outside the realm of today's realities. Their position explicitly supposes that the proletariat, otherwise inexperienced and unorganized and full of illusions, meets in the unions where freedom of speech would permit revolutionaries to expose the opportunist leadership and thereby spread revolutionary ideas.¹¹ In addition to the argument citing the prevalence of workers' illusions about unions, the key premise of the Leninist tactic was the fact that unions were considered as ideologically reformist and therefore supposedly interested in wresting concessions from the declining society by playing left-wing to the "liberal democrats" of an earlier age. These conditions no longer exist and those who continue to gear their activity towards them are acting in vain. Fifty times the proletariat has tried the experience of unions and of the parties which dominate them and they have changed in an undeniably reactionary direction. To act towards them as though they were still reformist is a ridiculous expression of today's opportunism.

The most solid basis for a revolutionary critique of unions concerns not tactical or contingent considerations but the question of principle and strategy. These questions had not been taken into account by Lenin and Trotsky probably because the changes in unions had not clearly developed until the last few decades. The fact is that unions and their political inspirers have been completely assimilated by the capitalist world, not as part of the "democratic wing" of the bourgeoisie but as henchmen for the exploitative society and for the new needs of the counter-revolution. The polemic between Lenin, Trotsky and Tomsky on the union question, which occurred before the sinister shadow of the Stalinist police had ravaged revolutionary thought, finds its synthesis after long periods of trial and error, in the political conclusions of this article.

There are still revolutionaries who refuse to see the problem and repeat like a credo: "since the conditions which gave rise to unions still exist, we do not see how today one can deny their utility." At the same time they postpone the elimination of unions until the moment when the "specific characteristics of bourgeois society disappear," that is, when the separation between workers and instruments of production has disappeared.¹² This is more sententious

11 Lenin, *Left-wing Communism* 1920.

12 The Italian political tendency of Bordiga whose arguments we combat here (*IL Programma Comunista*, May 26, 1960) defends the conservative union tactic from the most revolutionary point of view. But many Trotskyist and anarchist groups (if not all) fall into the same error with an opportunist flavor. Even those who claim to be against the unions, like "Socialisme ou Barbarie," in fact fall into the same old routine practices.

subterfuge than reasoned argument. In a sense this argument can be used against itself. If when we speak of conditions which have given rise to unions, we mean the purchase of human labor power by the monopolizers of the means of production, or in a more general way, the characteristic relations of capitalist society as a whole, then it is clear that unions are part of this whole network of relations and that unions continue to exist with it and for it. From this point of view, to attribute a useful function to unions in the revolutionary process is as unthinkable as seeing revolutionary potential in the stock market. Unions are as much a part of capitalist value production as the stock market, even if we examine only the aspects of the dealing and contracting of wage labor, aspects which are not unconnected to the values quoted on the stock market.

In addition to these conditions which gave rise to unions, conditions of a historically more limited nature must be dealt with. In the period of capitalist ascendancy, free competition, including free competition in the labor market, permitted workers to benefit from the greatest number of advantages compatible with the System. The regulation and administration of these advantages constituted the fundamental *raison d'être* of unions. However, with the System's transformation into giant trusts and state capitalism, the unions, which it nourished, naturally began to play a reactionary role. They could not continue to maintain their function without adapting themselves to changing market conditions now no longer free but controlled and despotic, indeed Malthusian since it prevents the realization of human and economic potential.

Thus in a strict sense the conditions which gave rise to unions no longer exist; they died at the same time as that which justified the existence of capitalism as a historically progressive social form. Unfortunately it is the revolutionaries who are way behind in recognizing the facts and drawing the logical conclusions.

The reasoning of *Programma Communista* which offers the best theoretical justification for all tendencies (including anarchism) still clinging to an Oppositional or revolutionary unionism, is in fact completely mistaken. Their reasoning is very dangerous especially in the event of a victorious revolution. The subterfuge of putting off the disappearance of unions until the obliteration of all traces of capitalism--until the advent of full communism--would give unions a harmful monopoly over the proletariat in the transitional period. Far from bringing Society closer to communism, this would raise still another obstacle, and not a minor one, promoting the growth of state capitalism as it did in Russia. Bordiga's analysis links the disappearance of unions to the disappearance of violence within the Society, meaning in fact the disappearance of the state. However, the withering away of the state and of all social violence can only be a consequence of a preceding disappearance of the exploitation of labor, wage labor to be exact. Unions are in complete contradiction to such a transformation, both in terms of interest and principle.

A century ago Karl Marx reproached unions for restricting their demands to questions of money, hours of work, etc., while they ignored the issue of the abolition of wage labor, the key to the destruction of capitalism. Today, Marx would be treated as a petty-bourgeois egali-

tarian by the men of Moscow and as a crazy ultra-leftist by those who believe they can reform unions. Marx did not see the elimination of unions as part of the far-distant future, well after the revolution, but as concomitant with the revolution or even its cause. He believed that already in his lifetime the industrialized countries disposed of sufficient material means to tackle the problem of revolution. We, revolutionaries of today, are able to add that unions stand in the way of every aim of social revolution because they have become an indispensable cog in the machinery of the exploitation of man by man. Their role in the present economy is comparable to that of the guilds in the age of small-scale manufacture-with this difference however: guilds proved unable to adapt to large-scale industry whereas unions adapt perfectly to the most resolute type of capitalism, the stratified form. Unions will be destroyed only by the victory of the revolution; more precisely their destruction is a pre-condition for this victory, without which the unions will continue to grow into a huge coercive apparatus complementary to the state capitalist machine. That is the greatest counter-revolutionary danger of our time. If humanity proves unable to face this problem in the West as well as in the Stalinist East, it will witness the most ominous era of our history.

After the revolution, all workers (without need of any union affiliation whatsoever) must decide on the economic questions posed by society's progress towards communism. No organization, whether a union or a party can be identified with the society as a whole or invested with its attributes. The existence of differing ideological currents (based on the foundations of the revolution) all competing for a majority will only further insure the Possibility of direct participation of all in social decisions. But a union-style management of the economy will necessarily prove anti-democratic and stifling; it would exclude non-members and impose itself on everyone. Of course ideologies can degenerate or betray but only through the spread and growth of revolutionary ideas can man win his freedom. Even today the proletariat's immediate demands elude union formulations. Faced with exploitation heightened by technology, forced overtime, piecework, speed-up, etc., it is essential to demand a reduction of the work day to a maximum of five to six hours without reduction of wages or bonuses. On such a basis, demands for constantly decreasing work schedules in inverse proportion to technological progress are urgently needed. This is the way to challenge today's crushing work day and to prefigure a reorganization of socially necessary work by eliminating the enormous amounts of waste production in industry as well as in the government and administrative bureaucracies.

The necessary complement to this demand is the refusal to go along with any increase in production, whether caused by improvements in machinery or by speed-up, unless the working class benefits; the working class represents the interests of society as a whole. This is an unlimited demand, not only against capitalism and its threats of constant war, but as an idea of the kind of considerations which would govern a future revolutionary society; underlying this demand is the necessity for the destruction of the present system.

Politically, workers must impose complete freedom at the point of production the rejection of all rules which have not been decided upon by workers' delegates democratically elected and approved in general assembly. In the case of problems or conflicts, workers' committees,

elected outside of all union structures, are revocable at any time. Any agreement with management must have the consent of the interested parties themselves and not the unions even if they claim to represent the majority. Finally, co-ordination among the different workers' committees would prepare the way for the demand, as an immediately realizable objective, for workers' control of production and distribution.

A careful study of the problems which face the working class today would only reinforce these conclusions. The three types of problems, which encompass all the others, amply demonstrate the reactionary conservatism of unions and the fact that it is impossible for the workers to make a move ahead without coming up against them. Without getting rid of them, the proletariat will never get out of its present difficulties and will never have a revolutionary perspective.

The future of unions is indisputably linked with that of capitalism and not the revolution. Their ability to adjust to the reactionary transformation of society was largely overlooked by even the most far-seeing revolutionaries. An exception must be made for an almost unknown theoretician, Daniel DeLeon, whose thoughts on this subject have proven visionary. From 1905 DeLeon saw that unions and the "official" workers' parties harbored serious counter-revolutionary dangers. The work in which he succinctly expressed his ideas deserves the attention of all revolutionaries.¹³

DeLeon's judgments are excellent historical analyses which he expresses with revolutionary passion. On the basis of international experience, particularly with the British and American trade unions and their respective labor leaders, he predicts that the victory of these organizations would kill any social revolution:

"The present labor leaders represent a disguised position, a strategic point and a force sustaining capitalism and their true nature cannot but produce a disastrous de-moralization of the working class."

He compares the labor leaders and their organizations with the leaders of the plebs in Rome. Just as the pleb leaders used the plebeians to acquire the rights and privileges of the patrician class without giving anything more than crumbs to the dispossessed masses, modern labor leaders and their organizations use the proletariat to consolidate their economic and political position within the capitalist system of exploitation.

"Like the leaders of the plebs, labor leaders are practical men as they boast; they do not live on visions or chase rainbows. Like the pleb leaders, labor leaders do not see any alternative to the existing social system, and they aim to put out the flame that devours the working class. Like the plebeian leaders of Rome, today's labor leaders, if we do not counteract them...they will nul-

13 Two Pages From Roman History. 1. Pleb Leaders and Labor Leaders, II. the Warning of the Gracchi (New York 1946).

lify all the possibilities which our age offers: they will divert the important and powerful actions of the masses until they lose the name of action.”

The aptness of the comparison between the leaders of the Roman plebs and our union (and party) bureaucrats is even clearer if we examine the role of the so-called plebeian party in Roman history. This party, born in the time of the Tarquins, supposedly in irreconcilable opposition to the patrician ruling classes, enjoyed its greatest influence during the Republican period. Its power did not serve the true plebs, the poor masses, either slave' or free, but worked to the benefit of a privileged minority which represented the plebs in name only and belonged to the plebeian class only by the accident of Roman legal definition. Caesar and Augustus, the founders of Empire, constantly used the trick of referring to themselves as originally "plebs" or "on the pleb side." Their victory, the high point of the party of the pleb leaders, destroyed forever all possibility of revolution in Rome. The plebeian usurpers replaced by and large the old patrician class. They did not open the way to a new or superior type of Society but merely prolonged the decadence of the ancient world over which they presided in its final stage.

Despite the great structural and ideological differences between Greco-Roman civilization and capitalist civilization, the analogy between the role of the pleb leaders and today's labor leaders is close. Whether they call themselves apolitical, Communist or Socialist they have substituted for the principle contradiction of capitalism that which can only disappear with its destruction--another unessential contradiction inscribed within the functional necessities of capitalism and for which the "Solution" makes them indispensable to the exclusion of any revolutionary intervention of the worker's.

The bourgeoisie and the proletariat are the human profile, the anthropomorphic image of the social contradictions between capital and wage labor. This contradiction is unresolvable except with the abolition of capital--an act which must simultaneously abolish wage labor itself. Here ends capitalism and begins the social revolution: a new, unlimited horizon of a new civilization.

The Spirit of the so-called labor leaders as well as their organizations are absolutely incompatible with the solution of this contradiction. They attempt to resolve only a secondary contradiction within the framework of exploitation--that is, the anarchy of private capitalism with its cyclical crises which calls for an ordered plan of production and a severe regimentation of manpower, the unemployed included. In this way, the interests of the labor leaders coincide with that of big capital which every day demands more economic regulation, more concentration. In other words, that which they perceive and want to change are the difficulties which the System encounters on the road to one huge monopoly, not at all the difficulties which the system as a whole poses for the forward march of humanity towards communism. With the concentration of all the means of production in a huge state monopoly, labor--upon which depends consumption, liberty, culture, the whole life of human beings appears as an element which is as subordinate to the exigencies of the plan as iron ore, leather or any other raw material. The elimination of the bourgeoisie does not in any way mean the elimination of capital

or the proletariat. Capital is an economic function, not a proprietary function; in becoming an anonymous function it completes its oppression of man and bars his march to communism with new counter-revolutionary force. The use of the purely anthropomorphic representation of the contradiction between capital and wage labor (bourgeoisie and proletariat) gives the union and party leaders the opportunity to present the elimination of private capital as the elimination of capital in general and their economic and political management as the solution of social contradictions. They know from the experiences of the Stalinist counter-revolution and from Yankee and British trade unions that the more complete the concentration of capital, the bigger the share of profits for them to pocket.

The most menacing aspect of this tendency of the labor leaders is that it coincides with the law of capitalist concentration and with the development of material and ideological coercion which is its consequence. But they are really dangerous only because of the passivity of the proletariat, whom the revolutionaries, attached to the old ideas and tactics, do not know how to stir into action. Chained to the old formulae, they are cursed with sterility. But a careful look around suffices to realize that the human necessity of a total transformation challenges capitalism itself and the labor leaders, a challenge which will open an unlimited field to revolutionary action.

Humanity does not need technocratic plans in order to produce plans which are used for exploitation and war. The crisis which our civilization is living through will not find its solution until all of production is oriented towards consumption without regard to selling. All individuals by their very existence must be able to utilize the material and spiritual resources of the society. The marketing of one or the other leads to the dissatisfaction of the immense majority, the impossibility of individual fulfillment and the venality of culture. Only the elimination of individual proprietors and the giant trusts will lead to the elimination of the proletariat: the class which does not consume but lives only on its salary. Thus it is wage labor which must be eliminated. In this way capital will necessarily be abolished as an economic function along with the exploiters, be they bourgeois or bureaucrats. Any plan for production must be established with regard to the non-mercantile needs of human consumption, with all that these words imply of political and cultural liberty. The true anthropomorphic aspect of the problem is the abolition of wage labor which will give to man the possibility of determining his own destiny. By substituting for this the idea of simply eliminating the bourgeoisie (and by putting themselves in its place) union leaders offer us a series of fetishes—the economic plan in place of God, father and judge of man with the big union and party bureaucrats playing the role of the priesthood.

Revolutionaries must expel from the factories and professional organizations all the union representatives; and all the Thorez', the Nennis and the Reuthers of all countries, with the Vatican crouching behind the Christian unions, will be paralyzed. The working class will have regained its freedom of thought and action and will be able to transform society from top to bottom. It will have gained the strength to wrest humanity from the mire of degradation.

a rejoinder

judith allen

On Munis' "Demands"

Contrary to Munis' assertion that unions have abandoned their reformist function and have adopted a reactionary one, it is reformism itself which has become reactionary in the context of capitalism today. The entire reformist program is no longer valid and can only serve as a diversion to regroup workers around the illusions which protect the interests of the capitalist class. That Munis has not fully assimilated the futility of reformist formulations is demonstrated by his suggestions regarding transitional demands.

Demands for 'a reduction of the working day to five or six hours with no wage decrease,' for a 'refusal to carry out any increase in productivity if the working class doesn't benefit,' for 'complete freedom at the work place' are purely utopian within capitalism as Munis would undoubtedly recognize. These kinds of demands may serve as a point of departure for certain workers' struggles but it is only to the extent that workers' struggles go beyond them to challenge the fundamental basis of the system that these demands do not fall into wishful reformism. Munis seems to reject unionism as a form without completely rejecting its content: hollow reformism even if it does not limit itself to wage demands as such.

Reformism perpetuated outside union structures can be a grave handicap to the further development of wildcat movements. Partial consciousness rigidified into transitional programs and slogans is the most easily co-optable tool of the bourgeoisie. Utopian demands cannot mobilize the working class on a class basis, particularly when they are put forward by revolutionaries whose entire analysis consists in demonstrating their futility.

Unions and Reformism

Unionism corresponded to a particular historical period of workers' struggles. Its form was determined by its reformist content. Unions regrouped only a minority of the working class, just enough to be able to put pressure on the capitalist class. Unions organized workers in the image of the capitalist system itself: according to trade, job skills, industrial sector. Unions became increasingly bureaucratized as capitalism itself became more complex. Hierarchical relations became the norm as unions entered the field of bourgeois legality. Economic demands

were the unions' exclusive preoccupation and a political view of the system was relegated to a separate compartment: the political parties But as long as reformism was a valid perspective, unions continued to play a role in improving the lot of the working class.

But with reformism an illusion in a period of permanent crisis, the unions' role became that of mobilizing the working class behind the bourgeoisie in peace and wartime They guaranteed the subordination of workers' demands to the capitalist criteria of increased productivity and competitiveness In a system in danger, unions insured the swift channeling of any dangerous discontent which might threaten to overthrow the system. Unions became an essential pillar of support for capitalism's continued existence. Those who speak of 'the good old days' of the CIO, for example, are replaying a crushing defeat The CIO was the perfect mechanism conceived and encouraged by Roosevelt and his 'worker' collaborators, to insure the channeling of workers discontent during the depression, and despite the brave struggles of the rank and file workers, their 'victory' was an illusion.

Among the tasks which the CIO undertook was to help the capitalists introduce speed-ups and other types of 'rationalisation' into the process of production (increasing the rate of exploitation of the workers to help introduce compulsory overtime (extension of the working day), and to facilitate the laying off of masses of workers But the real nature of this so-called 'victory' is nowhere better seen than in the millions of dead and wounded workers whom the unions helped to mobilize for the second imperialist world war.

organized labor versus “the revolt against work”

j. zerzan

Serious commentators on the labor upheavals of the Depression years seem to agree that disturbances of all kinds, including the wave of sit-down strikes of 1936 and 1937, were caused by the ‘speed-up’ above all. Dissatisfaction among production workers with their new CID unions set in early, however, mainly because the unions made no efforts to challenge management’s right to establish whatever kind of work methods and working conditions they saw fit. The 1945 Trends in Collective Bargaining study noted that “by around 1940” the labor leader had joined the business leader as an object of “widespread cynicism” to the American employee. Later in the 1940s C. Wright Mills, in his *The New Men of Power: America’s Labor Leaders*, described the union’s role thusly: “the integration of union with plant means that the union takes over much of the company’s personnel work, becoming the discipline agent of the rank-and-file.”

In the mid-1950s, Daniel Bell realized that unionization had not given workers control over their job lives. Struck by the huge, Spontaneous walk-out at River Rouge in July, 1949, over the speed of the Ford assembly line, he noted that “sometimes the constraints of work explode with geyser suddenness.” And as Bell’s *Work and Its Discontents* (1956) bore witness that “the revolt against work is widespread and takes many forms,” so had Walker and Guest’s Harvard study, *The Man on the Assembly Line* (1953), testified to the resentment and resistance of the man on the line. Similarly, and from a writer with much working class experience himself, was Harvey Swados’ “The Myth of the Happy Worker,” published in *The Nation*, August, 1957, Workers and the unions continued to be at odds over conditions of work during this period. In auto, for example, the 1955 contract between the United Auto Workers and

General Motors did nothing to check the 'speed-up' or facilitate the settlement of local shop grievances. Immediately after Walter Reuther made public the terms of the contract he'd just signed, over 70% of GM workers went on strike. An even larger percentage 'wildcatted' after the signing of the 1958 agreement because the union had again refused to do anything about the work itself. For the same reason, the auto workers walked off their jobs again in 1961, closing every GM and a large number of Ford plants.

Paul Jacobs' *The State of the Unions*, Paul Saltan's *The Disenchanted Unionist*, and BJ. Widick's *The Triumphs and Failures of Unionism in the United States* were some of the books written in the early 1960s by pro-union figures, usually former activists, who were disenchanted with what they had only lately and partially discovered to be the role of the unions. A black worker, James Boggs, clarified the process in a sentence: "Looking backwards, one will find that side by side with the fight to control production, has gone the struggle to control the union, and that the decline has taken place simultaneously on both fronts." What displeased Boggs, however, was lauded by business. In the same year that his remarks were published, *Fortune*, American capital's most authoritative magazine, featured as a cover story in its May, 1963 issue Max Way's "Labor Unions Are Worth the Price."

But by the next year, the persistent dissatisfaction of workers was beginning to assume public prominence, and a June, 1964 *Fortune* article reflected the growing pressure for union action: "Assembly-line monotony, a cause reminiscent of Charlie Chaplin's *Modern Times*, is being revived as a big issue in Detroit's 1964 negotiations," it reported.

In the middle-1960's another phenomenon was dramatically and violently making itself felt. The explosions in the black ghettos appeared to most to have no connection with the almost underground fight over factory conditions. But many of the participants in the insurrections in Watts, Detroit and other cities were fully employed, according to arrest records. The struggle for dignity in one's work certainly involved the black workers, whose oppression was, as in all other areas, greater than that of non-black workers. Jessie Reese, a Steelworkers' union organizer, described the distrust his fellow blacks felt toward him as an agent of the union: "To organize that black boy out there today you've got to prove yourself to him, because he don't believe nothing you say." Authority is resented, not color.

Turning to more direct forms of opposition to an uncontrolled and alien job world, we encounter the intriguing experience of Bill Watson, who spent 1968 in an auto plant near Detroit. Distinctly post-union in practice, he witnessed the systematic, planned efforts of the workers to substitute their own production plans and methods for those of management. He described it as "a regular phenomenon" brought out by the refusal of management and the UAW to listen to workers' suggestions as to modifications and improvements in the product. "The contradictions of planning and producing poor quality, beginning as the stuff of jokes, eventually became a source of anger. Temporary deals unfolded between inspection and assembly and between assembly and trim, each with planned sabotage...the result was stacks upon stacks of motors awaiting repair...it was almost impossible to move...the entire six-cylinder assembly and inspection operation was moved away--where new workers were brought in to man

it. In the most dramatic way, the necessity of taking the product out of the hands of laborers who insisted on planning the product' became overwhelming."

The extent and co-ordination of the workers' own organization in the plant described by Watson was very advanced indeed, causing him to wonder if it wasn't a glimpse of a new social form altogether. arising from the failure of unionism. Stanley Weir, writing at this time of similar if less highly developed phenomena, found that "in thousands of industrial establishments across the nation, workers have developed informal underground unions" due to the deterioration or lack of improvement in the quality of their daily job lives." Until the 1970s--and very often still--the wages and benefits dimension of a work dispute, that part over which the union would become involved, received almost all the attention. In 1965 Thomas Brooks observed that the "apathy" of the union member stemmed from precisely this false emphasis: "...grievances on matters apart from wages are either ignored or lost in the limbo of union bureaucracy." A few years later, Dr. David Whitter, industrial consultant to GM, admitted, "That [more money] isn't all they want; it's all they can get."

As the 1960s drew to a close, some of the more perceptive business observers were about to discover this distinction and were soon forced by pressure from below to discuss it publicly. While the October, 1969, *Fortune* stressed the preferred emphasis on wages as the issue in Richard Armstrong's "Labor 1970: Angry Aggressive, Acquisitive" (while admitting that the rank and file was in revolt "against its own leadership, and in important ways against society itself"), the July, 1970 issue carried Judson Gooding's "Blue-Collar Blues on the Assembly Line: Young auto workers find job disciplines harsh and uninspiring, and they vent their feelings through absenteeism, high turnover, shoddy work, and even sabotage. It's time for a new look at who's down on the line.

With the 1970s there has at last begun to dawn the realization that on the most fundamental issue, control of the work process, the unions and the workers are very much in opposition to each other. A St. Louis Teamster commented that traditional labor practice has as a rule involved "giving up items involving workers' control over the job in exchange for cash and fringe benefits." Acknowledging the disciplinary function of the union, he elaborated on this time-honored bargaining: Companies have been willing to give up large amounts of money to the union in return for the union's guarantee of no work stoppages." Daniel Bell wrote in 1973 that the trade union movement has never challenged the organization of work itself, and summed up the issue thusly: "The crucial point is that however much an improvement there may have been in wage rates, pension conditions, supervision, and the like, the conditions of work themselves--the control of pacing, the assignments, the design and layout of work--are still outside the control of the worker himself. "

Although the position of the unions is usually ignored, since 1970 there has appeared a veritable deluge of articles and books on the impossibility to ignore rebellion against arbitrary work roles. From the covers of a few national magazines: Barbara Garson's "The Hell With Work," *Harper's*, June, 1972; *Ltfe* magazine's "Bored On the Job: Industry Contends with Apathy and Anger on the Assembly Line," September 1, 1972; and "Who Wants to Work?" in

the March 26, 1973 Newsweek. Other articles have brought out the important fact that the disaffection is definitely not confined to industrial workers. To cite just a few: Judson Gooding's "The Fraying White Collar" in the December, 1970 Fortune, Timothy Ingram's "The Corporate Underground," in The Nation of September 13, 1971, Marshall Kilduffs "Getting Back at a Boss: The New Underground Papers," in the December 27, 1971 San Francisco Chronicle, and Seashore and Barnowe's "Collar Color Doesn't Count," in the August. 1972 Psychology Today.

In 1971, "The Workers," by Kenneth Lasson, was a representative book, focusing on the growing discontent via portraits of nine blue-collar workers. The Job Revolution by Judson Gooding appeared in 1972, a management-oriented discussion of liberalizing work management in order to contain employee pressure. The Report of a Special Task Force to the Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare on the problem. titled Work in America, was published in 1973. Page 19 of the study admits the major facts: " absenteeism, wildcat strikes. turnover, and industrial sabotage [have) become an increasingly significant part of the cost of doing business." The scores of people interviewed by Studs Terkel in his Working: People Talk A bout What They Do All Day and How They Feel about What They Do (1 974), reveal a depth to the work revolt that is truly devastating. His book uncovers a nearly unanimous contempt for work and the fact that active resistance is fast replacing the quiet desperation silently suffered by most. Prom welders to editors to former executives, those questioned spoke up readily as to the feelings of humiliation and frustration. If most of the literature of "the revolt against work" has left the unions out of their discussions, a brief look at some features of specific worker actions from 1970 through 1973 will help underline the comments made above concerning the necessarily anti-union nature of this revolt.

During March, 1970. a wildcat strike of postal employees. in defiance of union orders, public employee anti-strike law, and federal injunctions, spread across the country disabling post offices in more than 200 cities and towns. In New York, where the strike began, an effigy of Gus Johnson, president of the letter carriers' union local there, was hung at a tumultuous meeting on March 21 where the national union leaders were called "rats" and "creeps." In many locations, the workers decided to not handle business mail, as part of their work action, and only the use of thousands of National Guardsmen ended the strike, major issues of which were the projected layoff of large numbers of workers and methods of work. In July, 1971, New York postal workers tried to renew their strike activity in the face of a contract proposal made by the new letter carrier president, Vincent Sombrotto. At the climax of a stormy meeting of 3,300 workers, Sombrotto and a lieutenant were chased from the hall and down 33rd Street, narrowly escaping 200 enraged union members, who accused them of "selling out" the membership.

Returning to the Spring of 1970, 100,000 Teamsters in 16 cities wildcatted between March and May to overturn a national contract signed March 23 by IBT President Fitzsimmons. The ensuing violence in the Middle West and West Coast was extensive, and in Cleveland involved no less than a thirty-day blockade of main city thoroughfares and 67 million

dollars in damages.

On May 8, 1970, a large group of hard-hat construction workers assaulted peace demonstrators in Wall Street and invaded Pace College and City Hall itself to attack students and others suspected of not supporting the prosecution of the Vietnam war. The riot, in fact, was supported and directed by construction firm executives and union leaders, in all likelihood to channel worker hostility away from themselves. Perhaps alone in its comprehension of the incident was public television (WNET, New York) and its "Great American Dream Machine" program aired May 13. A segment of that production uncovered the real job grievances that apparently underlied the affair. Intelligent questioning revealed, in a very few minutes, that "commie punks" were not wholly the cause of their outburst, as an outpouring of gripes about unsafe working conditions, the strain of the work pace, the fact that they could be fired at any given moment, etc., was recorded. The head of the New York building trades union, Peter Brennan, and his union official colleagues were feted at the White House on May 26 for their patriotism--and for diverting the workers--and Brennan was later appointed Secretary of Labor.

In July, 1970, on a Wednesday afternoon swing shift a black auto worker at a Detroit Chrysler plant pulled out an M-1 carbine and killed three supervisory personnel before he was subdued by UAW committeemen. It should be added that two others were shot dead in separate auto plant incidents within weeks of the Johnson shooting spree, and that in May, 1971 a jury found Johnson innocent because of insanity after visiting and being shocked by what they considered the maddening conditions at Johnson's place of work.

The sixty-seven day strike at General Motors by the United Auto Workers in the Fall of 1970 is a classic example of the anti-employee nature of the conventional strike, perfectly illustrative of the ritualized manipulation of the individual which is repeated so often and which changes absolutely nothing about the nature of work.

A Wall Street Journal article of October 29, 1970 discussed the reasons why union and management agreed on the necessity of a strike. The UAW saw that a walk-out would serve as "an escape valve for the frustrations of workers bitter about what they consider intolerable working conditions," and a long strike would "wear down the expectations of members." The Journal went on to point out that, "among those who do understand the need for strikes to ease intra-union pressures are many company bargainers. They are aware that union leaders may need such strikes to get contracts ratified and get re-elected." Or, as William Serrin succinctly put it: "A strike, by putting the workers on the street, rolls the steam out of them it reduces their demands and thus brings agreement and ratification; it also solidifies the authority of the union hierarchy."

Thus, the strike was called. The first order of the negotiating business was the dropping of all job condition demands, which were only raised in the first place as a public relations gesture to the membership. With this understood, the discussions and publicity centered around wages and early retirement benefits exclusively, and the charade played itself out to its pre-ordained end. "The company granted each demand [UAW president] Woodcock had made,

demands he could have had in September.” Hardly surprising, then, that GM loaned the union \$23 million per month during the strike? As Serum conceded, the company and the union are not even adversaries, much less enemies.

In November, 1970, the fuel deliverers of New York City, exasperated by their union president’s resistance to pleas for action, gave him a public beating. Also in New York, in the following March the Yellow Cab drivers ravaged a Teamsters’ Union meeting hall in Manhattan in response to their union officials’ refusal to yield the floor to rank and file speakers.

In January, 1971, the interns at San Francisco General Hospital struck, solely over hospital conditions and patient care. Eschewing any ties to organized labor, their negotiating practice was to vote publicly on each point at issue, with all interns present.

The General Motors strike of 1970 discussed above in no way dealt with the content of jobs. Knowing that it would face no challenge from the UAW, especially, it was thought, so soon after a strike and its cathartic effects, GM began in 1971 a co-ordinated effort at speeding up the making of cars, under the name General Motors Assembly Division, or GMAD. The showplace plant for this re-organization was the Vega works at Lordstown, Ohio, where the workforce was 85% white and the average age 27. With cars moving down the line almost twice as fast as in pre-GMAD days, workers resorted to various forms of on the job resistance to the terrific pace. GM accused them of sabotage and had to shut down the line several times. Some estimates set the number of deliberately disabled cars as high as 500,000 for the period of December, 1971 to March, 1972, when a strike was finally called following a 97% affirmative vote of Lordstown’s Local 1112. But a three-week strike failed to check the speed of the line, the union, as always, having no more desire than management to see workers effectively challenging the control of production. The membership lost all confidence in the union; Gary Bryner, the 29-year-old president of Local 1112 admitted: “They’re angry with the union; when I go through the plant I get catcalls.”

In the GMAD plant at Norwood, Ohio, a strike like that at Lordstown broke out in April and lasted until September, 1971. The 174 days constituted the longest walkout in GM history. The Norwood workers had voted 98% in favor of striking in the previous February, but the UAW had forced the two locals to go out separately, first Lordstown, and later Norwood, thus isolating them and protecting the GMAD program. Actually, the anti-worker efforts of the UAW go even further back, to September of 1971, when the Norwood Local 674 was put in receivership, or taken over, by the central leadership when members had tried to confront GMAD over the termination of their seniority rights.

In the summer of 1973, three wildcat strikes involving Chrysler facilities in Detroit took place in less than a month. Concerning the successful one-day wildcat at the Jefferson assembly plant, UAW vice president Doug Fraser said Chrysler had made a critical mistake in “appeasing the workers” and the Mack Avenue walkout was effectively suppressed when a crowd of “UAW local union officers and committeemen, armed with baseball bat” and clubs, gathered outside of the plant gates to ‘urge’ the workers to return.” October, 1973 brought the signing of a new three-year contract between Ford and the UAW. But with the signing, appeared fresh evidence

that workers intend to involve themselves in decisions concerning their work lives: “Despite the agreement, about 7,700 workers left their jobs at seven Ford plants when the strike deadline was reached, some because they were unhappy with the secrecy surrounding the new agreement.”

With these brief remarks on a very small number of actions by workers, let us try to arrive at some understanding of the overall temper of American wage-earners since the mid-1960s.

Sidney Lens found that the number of strikes during 1968, 1969, and 1971 was extremely high. and that only the years 1937, 1944-46, and 1952-53 showed comparable totals. More interesting is the growing tendency of strikers to reject the labor contracts negotiated for them. In those contracts in which the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service took a hand (the only ones for which there are statistics), contract rejections rose from 8.7% of the cases in 1964, to 10% in 1965, to 11% in 1966, to an amazing 14.2% in 1967, levelling off since then to about 12% annually. And the ratio of work stoppages occurring during the period when a contract was in effect has changed. which is especially significant when it is remembered that most contracts specifically forbid strikes. Bureau of Labor Statistics figures reveal that while about one-third of all stoppages in 1968 occurred under existing agreements. “an alarming number,” almost two-fifths of them in 1972 took place while contracts were in effect. In 1973 Aronowitz provided a good summary:

“The configuration of strikes since 1967 is unprecedented in the history of American workers. The number of strikes as a whole, as well as rank-and-file rejections of proposed union settlements with employers. and wildcat actions has exceeded that in any similar period in the modern era.” And as Sennett and Cobb, writing in 1971 made clear, the period has involved “the most turbulent rejection of organized union authority among young workers.”

The 1970 GM strike was mentioned as an example of the usefulness of a sham struggle in safely releasing pent-up employee resentment. The nation-wide telephone workers’ strike of July, 1971 is another example, and the effects of the rising tide of anti-union hostility can also be seen in it. Rejecting a Bell System offer of a 30% wage increase over three years, the Communication Workers’ union called a strike, publicly announcing that the only point at issue was that “we need 31 to 32 per cent,” as union president Joseph Beirne put it. After a six-day walkout, the 1% was granted, as was a new Bell policy requiring all employees to join the union and remain in good standing as a condition of employment. But while the CWA was granted the standard ‘union-shop’ status, a rather necessary step for the fulfillment of its role as a discipline agent of the work force, thousands of telephone workers refused to return to their jobs, in some cases staying out for weeks in defiance of CWA orders.

The calling of the 90-day wage-price freeze on August 15 was in large part a response to the climate of worker unruliness and independence, typified by the defiant phone workers. Aside from related economic considerations, the freeze and the ensuing controls were adopted because the unions needed government help in restraining the workers. Sham strikes clearly lose their effectiveness if employees refuse to play their assigned roles remaining. for example,

on strike on their own.

George Meany, head of the AFL-CIO, had been calling for a wage-price freeze since 1969, and in the weeks prior to August 15 had held a number of very private meetings with President Nixon. Though he was compelled to publicly decry the freeze as “completely unfair to the worker” and “a bonanza to big business,” he did not even call for an excess profits tax; he did come out strongly for a permanent wage-price control board and labor’s place on it, however.

It seems clear that business leaders understood the need for government assistance. In September, a *Fortune* article proclaimed that “A system of wage-price review boards is the best hope for breaking the cost-push momentum that individual unions and employers have been powerless to resist.” As workers try to make partial compensation for their lack of autonomy on the job by demanding better wages and benefits, the only approved concessions, they create obvious economic pressure especially in an inflationary period. Arthur M. Louis, in November’s *Fortune*, realized that the heat had been on labor officials for some time. Speaking of the “rebellious rank and file” of longshoremen, miners, and steelworkers, he said, “Long before President Nixon announced his wage-price freeze, many labor leaders were calling for stabilization, if only to get themselves off the hook.”

A *Fortune* editorial of January (1972) predicted that by the Fall, a national “wave of wildcat strikes” might well occur and the labor members of the tripartite control board would resign. In fact, Meany and Woodcock quit the Pay Board much earlier in the year than that, due precisely to the rank and file’s refusal to support the plainly anti-labor wage policies of the board. Though Fitzsimmons of the Teamsters stayed on, and the controls continued, through a total of four “Phases” until early 1974, the credibility of the controls program was crippled, and its influence waned rapidly. Though the program was brought to a premature end, the Bureau of Labor Statistics gave its ceiling on wage increases much of the credit for the fact that the number of strikes in 1972 was the smallest in five years.

During “Phase One” of the controls, the 90-day freeze, David Deitch wrote that “the new capitalism requires a strong, centralized trade union movement with which to bargain.” He made explicit exactly what kind of “strength” would be needed: “The labor bureaucracy must ultimately silence the rank and file if it wants to join in the tripartite planning, in the same sense that the wildcat strike cannot be tolerated. “

In this area, too, members of the business community have shown an understanding of the critical role of the unions. In May, 1970, within hours of the plane crash that claimed UAW chief Walter Reuther, there was publicly expressed corporate desire for a replacement who could continue to effectively contain the workers. “It’s taken a strong man to keep the situation under control,” Virgil Boyd, Chrysler vice chairman, told the *New York Times*. “I hope that whoever his successor is can exert great internal discipline.” Likewise, *Fortune* bewailed the absence of a strong union in the coalfields. in a 1971 article subtitled, “The nation’s fuel supply, as well as the industry’s prosperity. depends on a union that has lost control of its members.”

Despite the overall failure of the wage control program, the government has been helping the unions in several other ways. Since 1970, for example, it has worked to reinforce the conventional strike--again, due to its important safety-valve function. In June, 1970, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that an employer could obtain an injunction to force employees back to work when a labor agreement contains a no-strike pledge and an arbitration clause. "The 1970 decision astonished many observers of the labor relations scene,"--directly reversing a 1962 decision of the Court, which ruled that such walkouts were merely labor disputes and not illegal. Also in 1970, during the four-month General Electric strike, Schenectady, New York, officials "pleaded with non-union workers to refrain from crossing picket lines on the grounds that such action might endanger the peace." A photo of the strike scene in Fortune was captioned, "Keeping workers out--workers who were trying to cross picket lines and get to their jobs--became the curious task of Schenectady policemen. "

A Supreme Court decision in 1972 indicated how far state power will go to protect the spectacle of union strikes. Four California Teamsters were ordered reinstated with five years' back pay as a unanimous Supreme Court ruled [November 7, 1972] that it is unfair labor practice for an employer to fire a worker solely for taking part in a strike." Government provides positive as well as negative support to approved walkouts, too. An 18-month study by the Wharton School of Finance and Commerce found that welfare benefits, unemployment compensation, and food stamps to strikers mean that "the American taxpayer has assumed a significant share of the cost of prolonged work stoppages." But in some areas, unions would rather not even risk official strikes. The United Steelworkers of America--which allows only union officials to vote on contract ratifications, by the way--agreed with the major steel companies in March, 1973, that only negotiations and arbitration would be used to resolve differences. The Steelworkers' contract approved in April, 1974, declared that the no-strike policy would be in effect until at least 1980. A few days before, in March, a federal court threw out a suit filed by rank and file steelworkers, ruling in that the union needn't be democratic in reaching its agreements with management.

David Deitch, quoted above, said that the stability of the system required a centralized union structure. The process of centralization has been a fact and its acceleration has followed the increasing militancy of wage-earners since the middle- 1960s. A June, 1971, article in the federal Monthly Labor Review discussed the big increase in union mergers over the preceding three years. August, 1972, saw two such mergers, the union of the United Papermakers and Paperworkers and the International Brotherhood of Pulp, Sulphite, and Paper Mill Workers, and that of the United Brewery Workers with the Teamsters. In a speech made on July 5, 1973, Long-shoremen's president Harry Bridges called for the formation of "one big national labor movement or federation."

The significance of this centralization movement is that it places the individual even further from a position of possible influence over the union hierarchy--at a time when he is more and more likely to be obliged to join a union as a condition of employment. The situation is beginning to resemble in some ways the practice in National Socialist Germany, of requiring

the membership of all workers in 'one big, national labor movement or federation,' the Labor Front. In the San Francisco Bay area, for example, in 1969, "A rare--and probably unique--agreement that will require all the employees of a public agency to join a union or pay it the equivalent of union dues was reported in Oakland by the East Bay Regional Park District." And in the same area this process was upheld in 1973: "A city can require its employees to pay the equivalent of initiation fees and dues to a union to keep their jobs, arbitrator Robert E. Burns has ruled in a precedent-setting case involving the city of Hayward." This direction is certainly not limited to public employees. according to the Department of Labor. Their "What Happens When Everyone Organizes" article implied the inevitability of total unionization.

Though a discussion of the absence of democracy in unions is outside the scope of this essay, it is important to emphasize the lack of control possessed by the rank and file. In 1961 Joel Seidman commented on the subjection of the typical union membership: "It is hard to read union constitutions without being struck by the many provisions dealing with the obligations and the disciplining of members, as against the relatively small number of sections concerned with members' rights within the organization." Two excellent offerings on the subject written in the 1970s are *Autocracy and Insurgency in Organized Labor* by Burton Hal and "Apathy and Other Axioms: Expelling the Union Dissenter from History," by Il.W. Benson.

Relatively unthreatened by memberships. the unions have entered into ever-closer relations with government and business. A Times-Post Service story of April. 1969, disclosed a three-day meeting between AFL-CIO leadership and top Nixon administration officials. shrouded in secrecy at the exclusive Greenbriar spa. "Big labor and big government have quietly arranged an intriguing tryst this week in the mountains of West Virginia for a private meeting involving at least half a dozen cabinet members." Similarly, a surprising New York Times article appearing on the last day of 1972 is worth quoting for the institutionalizing of government-labor ties it augurs: "President Nixon has offered to put a labor union representative at a high level in every federal government department, a well-informed White House official has disclosed. The offer, said to be unparalleled in labor history, was made to union members on the National Productivity Commission, including George Meany, president of the AFL-CIO and Frank E. Fitzsimmons, president of the IBT, at a White House meeting last week... labor sources said that they understood the proposal to include an offer to place union men at the assistant secretary level in all relevant government agencies...should the President's offer be taken up, it would mark a signal turning point in the traditional relations between labor and government."

In Oregon, the activities of the Associated Oregon Industries, representing big business and the Oregon AFL-CIO, by the early '70s reflected a close working relationship between labor and management on practically everything. Joint lobbying efforts, against consumer and environmentalist proposals especially, and other forms of cooperation led to an exchange of even speakers at each other's conventions in the Fall of 1971. On September 2, the president of the AOI, Phil Bladine, addressed the AFL-CIO; on September 18, AFL-CIO president Ed Whalen spoke before the AOI.

In California, as in many other states, the pattern has been very much the same, with labor and business working together to attack conservationists in 1972 and defeat efforts to reform campaign spending in 1974, for example.

Also revealing is the “Strange Bedfellows From Labor, Business’ Own Dominican Resort” article on the front page of the May 15, 1973 Wall Street Journal by Jonathon Kwitney. Among the leading stockholders in the 15,000 acre Punta Cana, Dominican Republic resort and plantation are George Meany and Lane Kirkland, president and secretary-treasurer of the AFL-CIO, and Keith Terpe, Seafarers’ Union official, as well as leading officers of Seatrain Lines, Inc., which employs members of Terpe’s union.

Not seen for what they are, the striking cases of mounting business-labor-government collusion and cooperation have largely been overlooked. But those in a position to see that the worker is more and more actively intolerant of a daily work life beyond his control, also realize that even closer cooperation is necessary. In early 1971 Personnel, the magazine of the American Management Association, said that “it is perhaps time for a marriage of convenience between the two [unions and management]” for the preservation of order. Pointing out, however, that many members “tend to mistrust the union.”

The reason for this “mistrust,” as we have seen, is the historical refusal of unions to interfere with management’s control of work. The AFL-CIO magazine, The American Federationist, admitted labor’s lack of interest and involvement in an article in the January, 1974 issue entitled “Work is Here to Stay, Alas.” And the traditional union position on the matter is why, in turn, C. Jackson Grayson, Dean of the School of Business Administration at Southern Methodist University and former chairman of the Price Commission, called in early 1974 for union-management collaboration. The January 12 issue of Business Week contains his call for a symbolic dedication on July 4, 1976, “with the actual signing of a document--a Declaration of Interdependence” between labor and business, “inseparably linked in the productivity quest.”

Productivity--output per hour of work--has of course fallen due to worker dissatisfaction and unrest. A basic indication of the continuing revolt against work are the joint campaigns for higher productivity. such as the widely publicized US Steel-United Steelworkers efforts. A special issue on productivity in Business Week for September 9, 1972, highlighted the problem, pointing out also the opposition workers had for union-backed drives of this kind. Closely related to low productivity. it seems, is the employee resistance to working overtime, even during economic recession. The refusal of thousands of Ford workers to overtime prompted a Ford executive in April, 1974 to say, “We’re mystified by the experience in light of the general economic situation.” Also during April, the Labor Department reported that “the productivity of American workers took its biggest drop on record as output slumped in all sectors of the economy during the first quarter.”

In 1935 the NRA issued the Henderson Report which counseled that “unless something is done soon, they [the workers] intend to take things into their own hands.” Something was done, the hierarchical, national unions of the CIO finally appeared and stabilized relations. In

the 1970s it may be that a limited form of worker participation in management decisions will be required to prevent employees from “taking things into their own hands.” Irving Bluestone, head of the UAW’s GM department, predicted in early 1972 that some form of participation would be necessary, under union-management control, of course. As Arnold Tannenbaum of the Institute for Social Research in Michigan pointed out in the late 1960s, ceding some power to workers can be an excellent means of increasing their subjection, if it succeeds in giving them a sense of involvement.

But it remains doubtful that token participation will assuage the worker’s alienation. More likely, it will underline it and make even clearer the true nature of the union-management relationship which will still obtain. It may be more probable that traditional union institutions, such as the paid professional stratum of officials and representatives. Monopoly of membership guaranteed by management and the labor contract itself will be increasingly re-examined as workers continue to strive to take their work lives into their own hands.

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