

On the labor front

Communists as Union Officials?

(In a previous article—C-D, Feb. 24—we examined the role of unions under capitalism and communists in unions, and concluded that unions are not revolutionary organizations insofar as their goal is to make capitalism better. But we also pointed out that communists working towards the goal of working-class state power can turn union struggle into a weapon that brings the working class closer to that goal, especially by helping build the workers' vanguard communist party, in this case the PLP. We closed by asking two questions, the first of which we will comment on below: "If . . . workers . . . propose communists to lead the union, run for shop steward, president, etc., do we answer, No, we only fight for revolution and being an official in a trade union under capitalism is, by definition, reformist?")

AT ONE TIME WE IN PLP developed the idea that once workers elected communists to lead whole unions and, in fact, the basic sections of the labor movement, then we could use that strength to lead the working class to seize state power. However, now we see that:

(1) The ruling class would never allow the situation to reach that point. Long before communists lead the labor movement or even workers in one industry, the bosses would use their state apparatus to violently attack such a development;

(2) To prepare workers for such violent opposition to their class interests (which the bosses see as moving towards workers' state power), communists would have to explain the need to seize state power (and how) far sooner than the point at which workers might choose them to lead large unions or the whole labor movement; and therefore,

(3) "Winning union leadership" is not the key factor. Rather winning **POLITICAL** leadership at the point of production—power over production—is a key factor in using working-class strength to use for state power (not merely for power over production through sit-downs, strikes, etc.). Being "elected" to a union position might be the form that workers choose to establish communists at their helm, but the bosses and their junior partners who currently run the unions would—and do—use all their state power to prevent that (putting the union in trusteeship, passing laws banning communists as union officials, using troops to seize union halls, jailing the communists, etc.). Therefore, the key question is whether the workers see the **POLITICAL** necessity to follow communist leadership because it is fighting for total working-class emancipation, and that power at the point of production is an important factor in the drive to reach that goal.

A COMMUNIST "ELECTED to union office" while putting forward the relationship between the immediate issues and the need to destroy capitalism would then be telling workers that he or she would use that position to fight for

the **POLITICAL** interests of the workers. Since a union is a reform organization and does limit itself to trying to make capitalism "better," it is the job of a communist elected to union office (with workers knowing who and what they are electing) to **burst those reformist bonds**. A communist should point out how and why capitalism sets those limits and thereby perpetuates a boss-run system which creates the basis for grievances and the need to have a union in the first place (to defend against constant and inevitable boss attacks which are built into a profits-first economic system).

A communist functioning as this kind of union official (as described in the previous article—tying every grievance to why capitalism causes that grievance and therefore why it must be overthrown) would soon draw violent attack by the class enemy to oust him or her. Good! We would then use this **POLITICAL** attack to raise the political level of the workers, recruit to and build the PLP—all of which would bring the working class closer to this historic goal: seizing state power through socialist revolution.

Given such an outlook, would communists in unions and/or as officials put forward a "union program" (as against "the party's program")? No, if it was to make the union "better" under capitalism—a better grievance procedure, higher wages, more benefits, more union democracy (all of which the bosses have the power to take away, and inevitably do). Yes, if the "union program" involved uniting ALL workers, fighting racism, building working-class solidarity, strikes and general strikes, relying on ourselves and not on the bosses' government, etc. This kind of "program" is tied to preparing

workers for the necessity to seize state power through revolution. This "union program" is part of the party's program. Through fighting for such a program, **over the issues** of grievances, higher wages, better benefits, union democracy—all of which communists favor—workers begin to see the necessity to go **beyond** reforming capitalism which will be understood to be an **impossibility**.

SIMILARLY, COMMUNISTS do not concentrate on "exposing union sellouts" if that simply means showing how they sold out a contract, knuckled under to the boss, are trying to raise their fat salaries and hold onto their "cozy position"—and that we, "as communists," would "do the opposite," meaning get a better deal for workers under capitalism. But we **do** expose union sellouts insofar as we expose the greatest treachery of all: the fact that these lieutenants of the bosses, the Woodcocks, Wurfs, Meanys, Abels, etc., are weakening the workers' ability to fight the capitalist class, to fight for the only way we can **maintain** any gains, for a revolution and state power. We trace the reason for every sellout to **pro-capitalist ideas**, not to this or that union official being a "bad guy" and we would be "good guys."

Given all this, communists would certainly respond to workers' urgings to run for union office. And we would be in position to answer the charge that we are using our union position to build the PLP" by emphatically declaring, **Absolutely!** That is the best way that the workers' class interests can be defended and advanced!" (In the next article we will comment on the second question: what role do communists play in unions as that relates to their position as a force for or against fascism?)

Jamaica (continued from page 8)

Milk Products were on strike against a wage package handed down by the government's Industrial Disputes Tribunal; sugar workers in New Yarmouth were on strike, demanding an increase of wages during the last crop and at the start of this crop; cab drivers in Kingston were on strike triggered by the rise in the price of gasoline, joining a series of protests by transport drivers in Kingston Spanish Town and May Pen already in progress. (drivers must pay for gas out of their own pockets); and there had been a wildcat of road crews following the suspension of a driver who was involved in a fight with an inspector in Kingston.

So long as the profit system remains to exploit workers, no amount of high-sounding rhetoric will change the quality of life for working people in Jamaica. Whether it is Kaiser Aluminum and Alcan doing the exploiting or a Jamaican businessman, whether trade agreements are arranged

with American imperialism through the International Monetary Fund (IMF) or with Soviet imperialism through COMECON, the results remain the same—capitalism—in one form or another, and the working class always bearing the brunt of any economic crisis.

The Workers Liberation League, the revisionist Communist Party in Jamaica, joined the nationalist bandwagon in urging the working class to vote for the PNP under the leadership of Manley, "with all his half-wayism." They are a front for the Soviet Union and have given up the class struggle by default.

"A revolution is not a dinner party." The Jamaican working class needs real socialism, control of the government and the means of production to serve their own interests. This must actively participate in factory takeovers, land expropriation, and other revolutionary changes. A magic wand from above cannot proclaim it.

RED-BITS

PRETZELS WITH LYE . . .

The Food and Drug Administration disclosed last week that 19,000 cases of packaged pretzels made by Pepperidge Farm are sprinkled with lye! These lye crystals can burn the mouth, tongue, and throat. But what's a few thousand burned mouths, when the lye is so useful in giving pretzels their "glazed look!" They claim the stuff is safe when the chemicals are mized thoroughly and then the pretzels are baked. Some risk for a shiny pretzel!

THEY'RE SELLING POST CARDS OF THE HANGING

Remember Gilmore? The severely disturbed murderer, rapist and thief from Utah? Well pretty soon you won't be able to forget him. In the bosses' attempt to make him a hero, and windfall profits for themselves, tee-shirts, buttons, caps, TV specials and movies are in the planning. So along with the obvious fascist move that brought back the death penalty, we are going to get memorabilia commemorating sick individuals (produced by capitalism) like Gilmore. Clearly the U.S. bosses are getting closer and closer to overcoming the Nazis in decadence.

TOUGH LUCK, RACISTS!—A racist "anti-busing group," apparently led by union hacks in Louisville, Ky., didn't get the kind of turnout they hoped for at an anti-busing march on Feb. 26th. They expected 3,000, but only 250 showed. One of the leaders of "Union Labor Against Busing" said he was disappointed, but he thought that Atty. Gen. Griffin Bell "May be able to do something for us in the near future."

RACIST "HONOR"—Arthur Jensen, renowned racist, was elected to the American Assoc. for the Advancement of Science on Feb. 24th. A black member of the organization strongly protested the election, recognizing it as an "endorsement of racism." Jensen, with his fascist theories of the "genetic inferiority of black people," has been widely discredited as a racist. The action taken by the AAAS shows that science is not isolated from political issues, and can either serve the bosses or the workers. Under workers' control, racists like Jensen will be made members of one organization—the Association of Corpses!

