

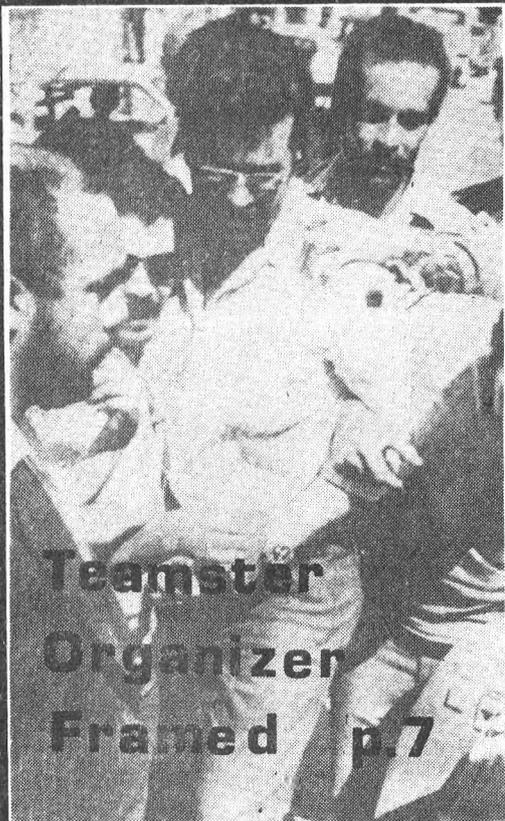
OBREROS EN MARCHA

POLITICAL ORGAN OF EL COMITE M.I.N.P.

VOL. 3 NO. 1

JANUARY 1978

PUERTO RICO



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Organizer
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EDITORIAL

PUERTO RICO & THE SOLIDARITY MOVEMENT IN THE U.S.

The economic crisis in Puerto Rico continues to plague the colonial government of Romero Barcelo. One year after his party, the New Progressive Party (PNP) won the colonial elections, unemployment in Puerto Rico has increased from 30% to 40%; 70% of those who are employed still must supplement their meager wages with government food stamps; and inflation has reached the level of 10%.

This economic crisis in Puerto Rico is reflective of the economic conditions in the U.S.; conditions on the island are worse because of its superexploited relationship to U.S. imperialism.

Neither of the two major bourgeois parties in Puerto Rico, the PNP (which calls for statehood), nor the Popular Democratic Party (PPD), which seeks to maintain Puerto Rico's present colonial status as a "free associated state," has been able to institute any program that could provide a solution to Puerto Rico's deteriorating economic conditions. Whichever bourgeois party remains in power—whether Puerto Rico becomes a state or remains in its present colonial position—its economic, political and social future is inextricably linked up to the interests of U.S. imperialism. Its bourgeoisie is inextricably tied to the U.S. ruling class.

As to be expected, the economic conditions have long set the basis for mass upheaval on the island, which in turn has resulted in a consistent use of the governmental repressive apparatus against the working class and various social sectors of Puerto Rico.

In recent years, the question of the economic crisis—as opposed to the question of political status—has dominated bourgeois politics on the island. After 4 years in power, the PPD lost last year's election to the PNP because Barcelo's party made the two dominant issues of the campaign the economic crisis and government corruption.

In its year in power, however, the PNP has shown that its only answer to the economic crisis—like that of the PPD—is to intensify the repression against the most active and militant sectors of the population, in particular, the organized labor movement. This repression has taken many forms: the use of professional strike-breakers; the fabrication of cases against labor leaders; the decertification of unions, the mobilization of the National Guard, etc. The lack of unity even among the more militant and class-conscious unions has left the labor movement unarmed and unable to effectively combat the repression. Consequently, it has been on the defensive, particularly in the last 4-5 years.

During the past 6 months, the repression has grown more intense; but the response of the labor movement has become more unified and combative. The execution of Alan Randall, a lawyer for U.S. corporate interests, by a self-named labor commando was used as a pretext to step up the harassment of the Teamsters Union which subsequently led to the police kidnapping, torture and brutal murder of a Teamster delegate, Juan Rafael Caballero (see OEM Vol. 2 #10). The response of 26 unions, among them the most strategically important and militant on the island, was to unite together to form the

Trade Union Committee Against Repression, as a first step toward developing a higher and more consolidated labor unity that addresses issues other than those that are strictly economic. Since then the Electrical and Irrigations Industry Workers Union (UTIER) and the Metropolitan Transport Workers (TUAMA) have gone out on strike. Both strikes have been characterized by militancy on the part of the workers and provocation and harassment on the part of the Barcelo administration (see pg.5). Most recently, as an attempt to divert the focus of the struggle from the workers' just demands, the government has charged Teamster organizer Miguel Cabrera with the execution of Alan Randall.

FOCUS OF SOLIDARITY WORK

Unfortunately the solidarity movement in the U.S. has not yet grasped the importance of the struggles of the labor movement. The efforts of the solidarity movement have focused on the political status question isolated from the struggles of the Puerto Rican working class. Consequently, the liberation process in Puerto Rico has been narrowly viewed as a struggle over the status question and has not been understood within the context of the struggle of the Puerto Rican working class for economic and social justice. This misconception, particularly on the part of Marxist-Leninists, has negated Puerto Rico's particular character as an industrial colony where the national liberation process is not only a struggle for independence but also for socialism and where the working class is the leading social force in this process. Unguided by this perspective, the solidarity movement has given little attention to the developing struggles and class-consciousness of the Puerto Rican labor movement and its significance for the national liberation process. The solidarity movement must come to understand that the struggle for independence cannot take place in isolation from the struggles of the working class to achieve even its immediate economic and social interests. Indeed, "independence" could be achieved and the working class could still be subjected to exploitation. This would be a neo-colonial solution to the question of political status.

In Puerto Rico, the workers' movement and the independence movement have developed on parallel paths but they have never converged. This reality must be changed if the Puerto Rican national liberation process is to move forward. The struggle for national liberation cannot be based on bourgeois patriotic sentiments. It must be based on a struggle that corresponds objectively to the real economic, political and social aspirations of the Puerto Rican working class and people in general.

This implies also that the solidarity movement in this country cannot be based on bourgeois "humanitarian" conceptions or abstract support for independence, but on a concrete understanding and support within the context of the national liberation process, of the working class movement and its struggles.

MINERS FIGHT BOSSES AND UNION COLLABORATION

"Don't scab for the bosses,
Don't listen to their lies.
Us poor folks haven't got a chance
Unless we organize."

*Miner's Song
"Which Side Are You On?"*

One mine worker is dead—killed by a "security guard" at a Kentucky mine site; hundreds of others have been harassed by local police and guards throughout the Appalachian and Mid-Western mining fields. The strike of the United Mine Workers (UMW), which began with the expiration of their union contract on December 6, is a culmination of a militant series of wildcat strikes, carried on periodically since 1975.

As the nationwide strike of over 160,000 coal miners enters its second month, top union officials are campaigning among local union leadership and rank & file to win ratification of a contract which would severely limit the rights of miners to protest job conditions as well as cut into benefits won in previous years. But thousands of rank and filers have shown their determination to continue the strike. The strike is against the attempts of the coal companies to increase production through suppression of the miners' wildcats, and in general to cut down on the power of the miners. But the strike is also against a conciliatory union leadership that is willing to sell out the rank and file. This conciliation was most recently evidenced by the agreement of UMW negotiators—led by President Arnold Miller—to a provision in the contract instituting penalties against miners out on a wildcat strike. (After swift and angry reaction from locals and individual miners all over the country, the negotiators declared that the new agreement would be discussed again.)

COMPANIES SEEK BROAD SANCTIONS AGAINST MINERS

The Bituminous Coal Operators Association (BCOA) seeks provisions in the new contract which would guarantee high levels of worker productivity without making large investments to modernize the process of coal production. In part, this is a response to the Carter Administration which has declared that to reduce reliance on oil imports and to increase energy self-sufficiency, the coal industry should seek to double domestic coal production by 1985. To reap maximum profit, while achieving this goal, the BCOA is demanding:

- that penalties be imposed for absenteeism in the form of either wage cuts or dismissals;

- that health benefits be funded by the companies only according to how much coal the workers produce.

- that the current grievance procedure which delays union complaints through a lengthy bureaucratic process be maintained;

- that the power of mine safety committees (currently controlled by the workers) be reduced or eliminated.

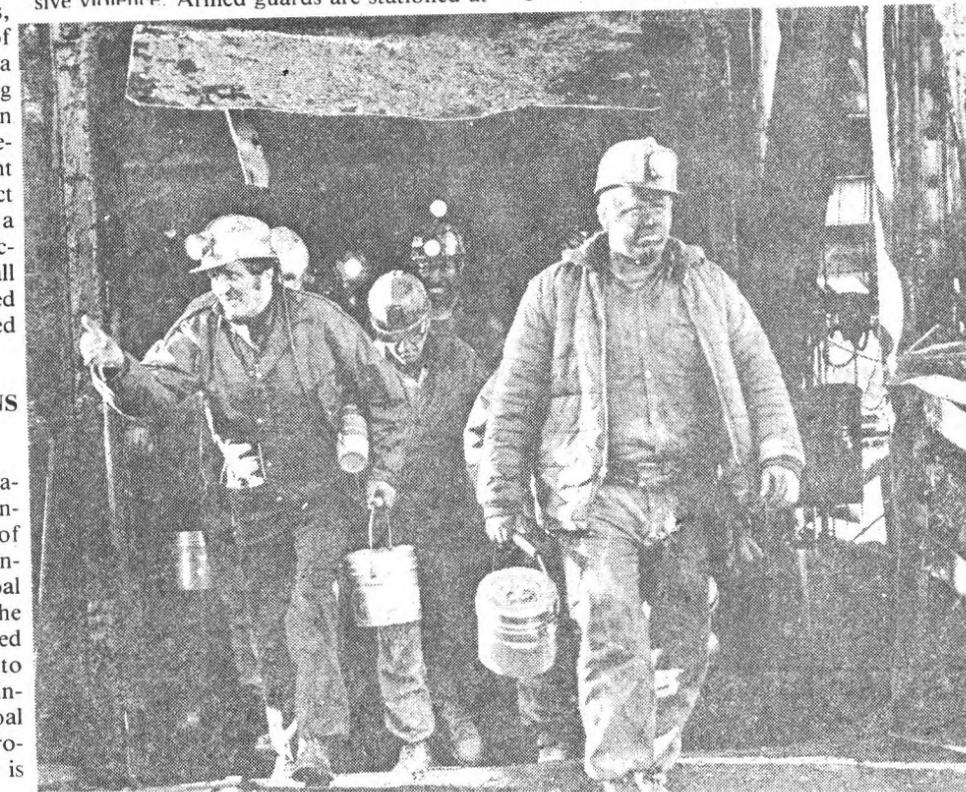
In an effort to weaken the union, the companies have threatened to cut all health benefits and pension payments to retired miners for the duration of the strike and for some time after a settlement is reached. (The BCOA claims that as long as production is stopped, the companies can't afford to keep these benefits up.) In addition, they propose to institute a system whereby separate contracts would be negotiated for individual mine fields instead of one contract for an entire region, thus further fragmenting the union.

The workers' tactics in the strike have included roving pickets, appeals to non-union miners to walk out in support of the strike, and educational campaigns against the unfavorable contract. Strike activity thus far has been met with provocations and repressive violence. Armed guards are stationed at

most picket sites. The miner who was killed was shot five times when he got into an argument with the guard while bringing food to a picket. Reports reveal that miners are prevented from picketing at many places and are often dispersed by force. Dispersion and harassment has come as much from local police and state officials as from hired industrial agents. The supposedly unbiased role of the government is very much exposed by these actions, which clearly defend the interests of the coal companies.

UNION LEADERSHIP

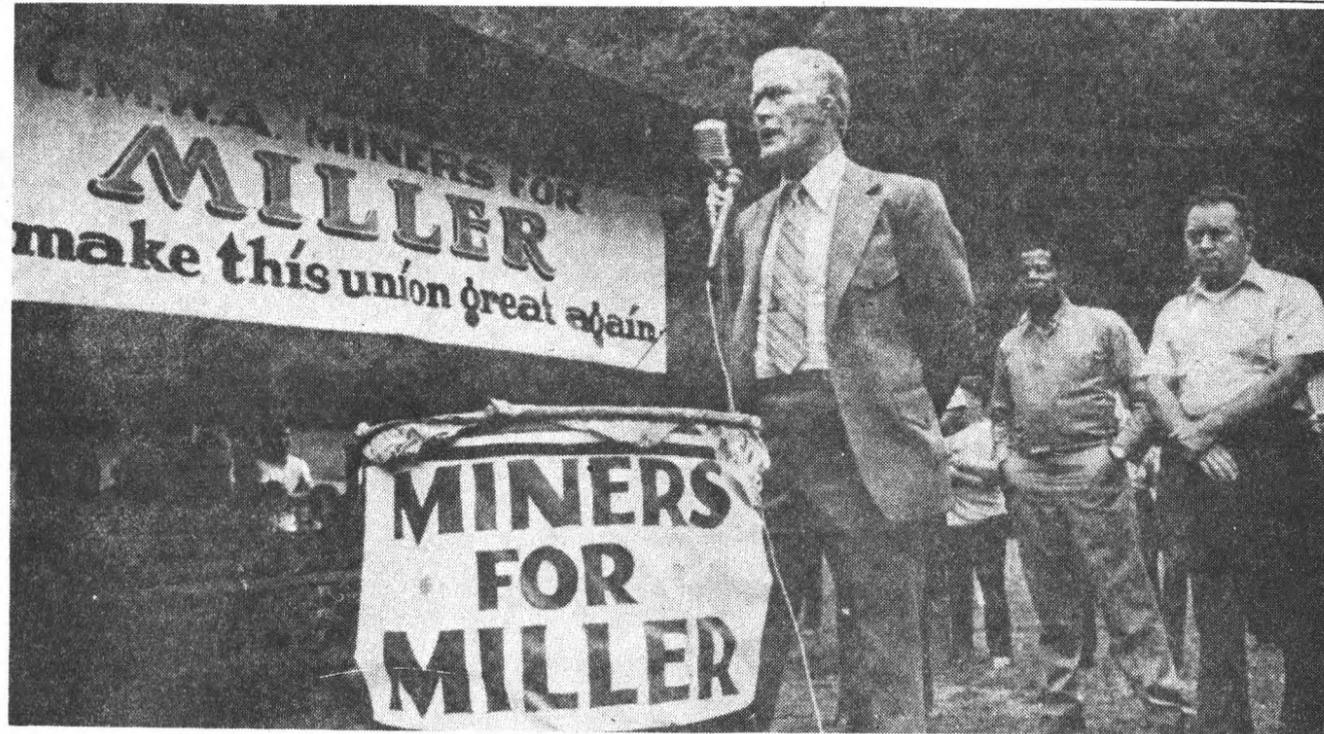
The top level union leadership, including Miller, was opposed to the strike but had to declare it "official" because of strong and firm rank and file demand. During the past few years, growing numbers of the UMW membership have increasingly criticized and exposed Miller for his conservative politics and conciliatory position toward the bosses. In the course of the current contract negotiations, Miller has put the question of "labor stability" ahead of the interests of the workers. This is because the rank and file protests have been directed as much against Miller as against the mine owners. Besides agreeing to



Miners leaving the Eccles no.5 mine in Eccles County, West Virginia just before the national United Mine Workers strike.

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Arnold Miller of the United Mine Workers.

penalties for participation in wildcats, Miller also agreed to penalties for absenteeism. Rank and file response to this has been a firm NO. However, Miller controls most of the 80-member bargaining committee as well as many of the district leaders and he is emphasizing "unity" within the union to gather support for his contract when it is presented for ratification.

Though Miller has spent the past two years consolidating his support in top level and secondary leadership, his base in the rank and file is rapidly weakening. The last contract he negotiated in 1974, voted on by only 60% of the union membership, was ratified by the thin margin of 55%-45%. In the last election he won the presidency with only 41% of the votes cast. Thus, the chances for Miller to get his sellout contract accepted are highly questionable since it is the entire membership (as opposed to only delegates) that ultimately votes on the contract.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STRIKE

The mine workers are not demanding increases in wages or benefits. The strike seeks to maintain rights previously won, and to prevent the bosses from increasing production at the workers' expense. If the strike is lost the bosses will have succeeded in setting back the organization of the rank and file. By imposing penalties for "unofficial" strikes and for absenteeism, the companies will be able to subject workers to intense speed-ups, without fear of wildcat strikes. These restrictions will also make the rank and file subject to the will of the union leadership since strikes will have to be officially approved in advance. The loss of this strike would also weaken the union's influence and its ability

to organize non-unionized coal miners.

Victory, however, will heighten the potential of rank and file consolidation. Such a major victory against the mine owners would also enable union miners to broaden their efforts to increase their ranks. If successful, their militance and determination will serve as an example to other unionized workers in their own battles against undemocratic unions and conciliatory leadership.

WEAKNESSES IN THE RANK AND FILE

However, a major weakness in the rank and file movement of the UMW has been its inability to develop ongoing rank and file participation in the union. The mine workers' activity has been strongest when confronted with blatant expressions of sell-outs and company attacks; but activity has been weak during interim periods. The rank and file has not understood that the only way union leadership will be consistently responsive to the interests of the base is if that base militantly demands responsiveness. This is an important step toward building a class-conscious union. To do this, the base must be organized and understand the need for consistent participation in the union. In the early 70s, Miners for Democracy, a rank and file caucus formed to fight the then-existing corruption within the union leadership, elected Arnold Miller to the presidency. At that time, Miller was viewed as someone who fought in the interests of the workers. After the election, Miners for Democracy disbanded. The failure of the rank and file to maintain itself as a political force in the UMW—and insure Miller's responsiveness or else kick him out—shows the clear necessity for ongoing militant rank and file formations.

The mine workers have a long history of militance and combativeness which obviously still exists today. Their historic combativeness, summarized by their phrase 'a blow against one is a blow against all', today represents a beginning class-consciousness, a beginning understanding of the nature of the capitalist system, the irreconcilable divisions between labor and capital, and the connection between the miners' struggle and the struggle of the working class overall.

For this consciousness to grow and develop into a full-blown class perspective, there needs to be communists within the union giving leadership in a principled way, thereby advancing a true working class perspective. At present with the UMW, and in the labor movement in general, this kind of leadership does not exist. But it is only with this guidance that the rank and file movement can become an effective instrument in the defense of the short and long-term interests of the working class.

It is difficult for those of us at a distance from the mine fields to give active assistance to the strikers but we have an essential responsibility to fulfill in educating other workers, students, progressive people etc. about the nature of the strike and the need to support it. As the strike continues there will undoubtedly be committees formed to collect funds and clothes, as well as to distribute propaganda analyzing and supporting the strike. There we certainly can demonstrate our support. Furthermore, those of us who belong to unions, community groups, student clubs, etc. must pressure these organizations to pass resolutions of solidarity and support and themselves take on the responsibility to educate people about the strike and the need for assistance.

Puerto Rico Informa

GOV. BARCELO OUT TO DESTROY UTIER

EDITOR'S NOTE: In the last issue of OEM (Vol.2 No. 12), Puerto Rico Informa carried an article on the then impending strike by the workers of the Electrical, Industry and Irrigation Workers Union (UTIER) against the Water Resources Authority (WRA) of Puerto Rico. Faced with the unwillingness of the WRA to bargain in good faith, the 6,200 members of the UTIER were forced on December 27 to walk off their jobs in order to intensify their struggle for a decent wage increase. The UTIER took this action after spending fruitless months in negotiations with the WRA. The strike against the WRA erupted at a time when leading members of our organization, El Comité-MINP, were in Puerto Rico. During that visit, they had an opportunity to talk with various labor leaders in Puerto Rico about the strike against the WRA and other issues facing the Puerto Rican Labor movement.

The WRA, the colonial administration of Romero Barcelo, and the commercial media have been waging a relentless campaign to discredit and isolate the UTIER from the Puerto Rican people. To achieve this end, they have unleashed a vicious campaign of lies, distortions and half-truths. Their intent is to portray the workers of the UTIER as overpaid fat-cats who are determined to gain a large wage increase from a financially limited WRA at the expense of the consumers of electrical power—who are other workers. In this campaign, these forces have rebaited the union leadership—particularly the UTIER's president, Luis Lausell, who is a known member of the Puerto Rican Socialist Party—and have attempted to blame the strike, and the militant actions that have characterized it, on the "manipulations of the socialists." This campaign has been waged through radio spots, newspaper ads, press releases, newspaper columns, editorials, press interviews etc. It has been ruthless and

widespread in its magnitude.

The colonial government wants to destroy the UTIER and the drive of public employees to unionize. The UTIER (as the most important public union) controls one of the most vital sectors of the Puerto Rican economy, the electrical power system. Moreover, it is one of the strongest, most militant and combative unions in Puerto Rico. This combination of factors have targeted the UTIER for special consideration by the colonial government of Romero Barcelo. If his administration is able to destroy or weaken the UTIER substantially, this strengthens his ability to combat and weaken the drive of public employees for unionization, the efforts of the public unions for decent wages and working conditions and the efforts of the entire labor movement to better its economic-social conditions.

This political objective has guided the tactics of the WRA and Barcelo's administration in its negotiations with the UTIER. The government wanted a strike and wants to maintain a long strike that drains and exhausts the resources of the UTIER. As part of this plan, the WRA has used its management personnel as strikebreakers to do the tasks normally done by the striking UTIER workers.

UTIER WORKERS RESPOND MILITANTLY

In the face of the vicious provocation and propaganda onslaught, the UTIER leadership has demonstrated its utmost commitment to bargain in good faith and in accordance with the best interest of its workers as well as all the workers of Puerto Rico. On the other hand, Pedro Vazquez, the executive director of the WRA and Barcelo have responded to these efforts by maintaining an intransigent position.

Faced with the WRA's intransigence and the concerted harassment of their leadership, as well as the leadership of other militant unions—which has been expressed in systematic violence against labor leaders (such as the



UTIER workers man picket lines on December 29. Signs read: "Workers producing, Pedro Vazquez lying" "Lausell, the membership is with you" "I am a productive worker, also combative"

murder of Caballero-Santana and the arrest of Miguel Cabrera)—the members of the UTIER have been forced to resort to acts of sabotage (cutting wires and poles, dismantling towers, blowing up towers etc.). They have done this to pressure the WRA and the colonial government to bargain in good faith. These acts have not been undertaken frivolously or indiscriminately by the workers: an accident can easily take their lives or cause serious injury. Already a young worker, Samuel Rodriguez Estrella, 32 years old, has lost his life trying to dismantle a tower when it collapsed and crushed him. Moreover, if caught they face long jail sentences. Nonetheless, faced with the repressive tactics increasingly utilized by the colonial government (assassinations, arrests, harassments, etc.) the UTIER workers have begun to recognize the need to struggle and organize themselves to confront this situation at the levels necessary. They have utilized the



This worker died fighting for better working and living conditions. The AFF is responsible for his death.

means at their disposal to wage their struggle and defend their interests against the bosses attempts to destroy their union.

Press commentators and the WRA have tried to place the blame for acts of sabotage on "leftists" but it is clear that workers in the UTIER from all shades of the political spectrum have engaged in these acts. Indeed, Samuel Rodriguez Estrella, the young worker that was killed in the accident, was a sympathizer of the New Progressive Party—the party in power.

BARCELO MOVES TO CRUSH STRIKE

Using the acts of sabotage as a justification (soon after the strike was officially called) Governor Barcelo gave orders to Adjutant General Orlando Llenza to place on alert the 500 men of the 2nd Battalion of the Puerto Rican National Guard. In addition, all police leaves and vacations were canceled. Barcelo also met with the Superintendent of Police, commanders from the National Guard and other directors of repressive agencies in order to establish lines of communication, cooperation, and coordination among these forces. As a result, a special strike command was established in Police Headquarters to coordinate all the efforts of these repressive agencies.

Barcelo complemented these moves by going on radio and television and demagogically attacking the acts of sabotage against the equipment and installations of the WRA without addressing the irresponsible role of the WRA and his administration. In that broadcast, he also announced the formation of a fact finding committee of "distinguished" citizens to study the position of the UTIER and the WRA. The governor took this action to set in motion the necessary mechanisms (if he decides to take that option) to seek an injunction of up to 80 days against the union. Barcelo selected seven individuals to serve on this committee, among them former Governor Roberto Sanchez Vilella. He gave it 5 days to submit its finding. The members of the committee (except for Sanchez Villa) all have political ties to the PNP—the party in power. On the other hand, Vilella, although active in the Popular Democratic Party, is respected throughout Puerto Rico for his honesty and integrity and independent political views.

Realizing that the committee was stacked against the union, Luis Lausell refused to testify before the whole committee but only Sanchez Vilella. It was only after Sanchez Vilella requested that he also testify before Jose "Chepo" Caraballo, the president of the Sugar Cane workers of the south of Puerto Rico, and Raymon Gonzalez, the ex-head of the Commerce Department, that Lausell conceded to do so.

The report submitted by the fact finding panel was not a unitary report. A minority report was submitted by Sanchez Vilella. He posed that the WRA has sufficient funds in its budget to give the UTIER workers a substantial raise—of at least .89¢ an hour. According to his assessment of the data, the WRA's presentation was confusing and contradictory and concealed the agency's actual financial situation. It was his assessment, based on the agency's income and expenses, that it could allocate at least 16 million dollars of its budget to worker's salaries.

Consistent with the political ties and economic interests that they serve, the majority of the committee accepted almost totally the analysis of the WRA and concluded that the most the WRA could give in wage increases was .50¢ an hour in pay increases. xxx

The union's original wage demand was for a raise of \$1.69 an hour (or \$226 a month) but it has lowered that demand substantially. Presently the union is willing to accept .89¢ an hour raise (or a little over \$100 a month), which was suggested by the findings of Sanchez Vilella. The WRA, however, has only raised its offer from .11¢ an hour to .18¢. The union has categorically rejected the offer as ridiculous and an insult to the workers of the UTIER. The claim of the WRA is that the workers of the UTIER are already some of the best paid workers in Puerto Rico and that the earnings of the agency do not permit higher wage offers. In response, the union has categorically rejected the WRA's position and substantiated its argument with its own figures, those of the WRA and Sanchez Vilella's minority report. However, it has not negated that its mem-

TEAMSTER ORGANIZER ARRESTED



Miguel Cabrera, Teamster organizer.

Miguel Cabrera an organizer for the Teamsters Union was arrested last Friday Jan. 13 and was charged along with two other persons with the killing of Corporate Lawyer Alan H. Randall. Alan Randall, known within the labor movement in Puerto Rico for his anti-labor activities and collaboration with the federal and colonial repressive agencies was executed by an unidentified Labor Comando on September 22.

Soon after the execution, the colonial government used the Randall case as the basis to intensify its repressive campaign against the organized workers movement. The Teamsters Union became one of the key targets singled

bers are some of the best paid workers in Puerto Rico. But it has pointed out the misleading character of that comparison considering the miserable wages that the average Puerto Rican worker earns. Further it has pointed out that this assertion negates that the average UTIER worker earns \$7,000 a year which is far from a large salary based on U.S. standards; and, in Puerto Rico, where the cost of living is higher than in the U.S., this is not at all an adequate salary for any head of a household.

Despite the government's attempt to isolate the UTIER, other unions have expressed their solidarity with the UTIER. This has been the case with the Independent Union of Airport Workers, the Boilermakers Union, the Teamsters, and numerous other unions. This solidarity has been expressed on the picket line, through public statement, by the education of their membership and by solidarity demonstrations. This has served to raise the moral of the striking UTIER workers and helped to combat the massive propaganda campaign of the WRA and the Barcelo administration.

out. Various Teamsters organizers and their families were subjected to harassment by police agents.

Luis Carrion, Miguel Cabrera and other organizers became objects of concerted harassment and hunt by the police's death squadron organized to eliminate physically the most class conscious and militant organizers of the workers movement. This police hunt led to the brutal torture and murder of Juan Rafael Caballero Santana, another Teamster organizer in the hands of the death squadron. Caballero's body was found in an advanced state of decomposition a few yards away from a federal house in the Yunque forest believed to have been used by the death squadron to torture their victims. Carrion and Cabrera were able to survive the brutal hunt unharmed due to massive support that they received from the labor movement and from other sectors of the population.

The arrest of Miguel Cabrera is part of the intensified repressive campaign that the colonial government is waging against the workers. It comes at a time when important trade unions in the island are carrying out a determined and militant struggle against their bosses to improve their living and working conditions. Members of the Electrical Industry and Irrigation Union were forced to walk off their jobs on Dec. 27 by the Water Resources Authority which is trying to destroy the union. The Metropolitan Bus Authority workers are also on strike. It is also expected that in the next few weeks the Taxi and public car drivers will walk off their jobs in defense of their interests and in support of the UTIER and the MBA workers.

With the fabrication of the case against Cabrera, the government is attempting to put pressure on the workers in order to drive attention from their strikes and destroy the workers unions. However, the workers recognized this old maneuver and will not be fooled by it. They have remained firm on their struggles and will defend themselves from all forms of attacks from the governing classes.

It is important that we here in the U.S. bring information about the situation in Puerto Rico to our rank and file and mass organizations in order to create favorable conditions so that we can render effective support to the striking workers as well as to the defense of Cabrera.

WORKERS UNITED WILL NEVER BE DEFEATED!

In the U.S., it is important to take up support for the workers of the UTIER but that support must be based on the development of a firm understanding of the present reality confronting the Puerto Rican working class and its labor movement. Responsibility for developing this analysis falls on Marxist-Leninists in this country and the Puerto Rican solidarity movement. The expression of the concrete forms of support can be channeled through the organizational vehicles that presently exist—namely the Puerto Rico Solidarity Committee and the U.S. Trade Union Committee Against Repression.

We urge that the work be taken up seriously and consistently within the trade unions in the communities and the universities etc. This work can be begun by sponsoring resolutions, and letters of support within our unions and rank and file groups through the organizations in which we participate and by expressing our support through letters and telegrams of support to the UTIER and by communicating our denunciation to the colonial government and the WRA.

PINOCHET'S ELECTION : MOCKERY OF DEMOCRACY

Contribution by NICH (Non-Intervention in Chile)

Chile's military dictator, Augusto Pinochet, last month planned and carried out an election fraud that brought the masses to the streets for the first time in over four years. But despite signs of opposition and division—even within the four-man junta—the vote has now taken place and Pinochet seems to have consolidated even more personal power. According to Pinochet, "there are no divisions within the military junta because we remain united. But now I lead the way and the other three follow."

In the days preceding the plebiscite, in which Pinochet declared he had received a vote of confidence from 77% of the voters, growing crowds filled the streets of downtown Santiago, shouting "Freedom!" and "Vote No!" On the day before the election more than 400 protesters crowded the mall in the center of the city.

The national plebiscite was called unilaterally by Pinochet in mid-December to oppose what he called the "international aggression" of the United Nations. The previous week, 99 countries had voted in favor of a resolution condemning for the third straight year Chile's continuing violation of human rights. For the first time the U.S. co-sponsored the draft resolution.

Pinochet's carefully worded question meant that a vote "Yes" to uphold Chile's "dignity" against external opinion would at the same time affirm the so-called legitimacy of the current government and of Pinochet himself.

In order to hinder the mobilization of left opposition, Pinochet called for the vote to take place on January 4, little more than two weeks after the announcement. He also decreed that voting would be obligatory. Left forces and the Christian Democrats declared that voters should abstain or vote "no," and together with Cardinal Silva Henríquez of the Catholic Church, labeled the election a



A protest in Santiago, Chile, condemning the Pinochet regime.

violation of human rights.

Leading up to the election, the one-sided Chilean press whipped up nationalist sentiment against the "interfering UN," and urged voters to remember the "communist chaos" of the Allende period. Flyers dropped on the city of Santiago from planes urged women to vote with the safety of their family and home in mind.

Control of voting would be through identity cards which in Chile are used to transact any kind of business—even to buy a bus ticket. Thus boycotting the bogus election was risky, and voting "no" would undoubtedly be meaningless. In addition, the electoral rolls had been burned after the junta took power in 1973 and the military was controlling the balloting and counting.

OPPOSITION WITHIN THE JUNTA

The most serious opposition to Pinochet's idea was from junta member General Gustavo Leigh Guzman, commander of the air force. With support from his navy counterpart, Admiral Jose Merino Castro, Leigh let it be known that he opposed the personalist approach of Pinochet and feared further international repercussions from an election that would have so little credibility. Leigh represents the small bourgeois nationalist interests in Chile and has for the last four years been at odds with Pinochet, who serves the interests of the large bourgeoisie and the multinational corporations.

Leigh was in fact correct in his fears. Even the U.S. State Department, a staunch supporter of the military regime in Chile, issued a post-election statement calling the plebiscite unfair on the grounds that political activity and "freedom of the press and assembly are sharply restricted."

With his obviously manufactured mandate firm in hand, Pinochet will now clamp down once again. He has already stated that this was the last election for Chile for the next eight years. Leigh, who was conspicuously absent from Pinochet's victory speech, seems to have lost this round, but retains enough strength to retain his leadership position. The one thing that appears clear from this exercise is there is no one at this moment, or perhaps on the horizon, who can seriously challenge Pinochet, either from within the military or without.

STATEMENT FROM THE MIR

The Movement of the Revolutionary Left (MIR), in a declaration from their Exterior Committee in Havana, Cuba, laid bare the brutal charade that was the election and reaffirmed that the struggle is not an electoral one:

"No one can bestow credibility on the 'Pinochet plebiscite' since to do so would be to support the silence of the dictatorship about the 2,500 disappeared, the assassinations and tortures of the ex-DINA, the situation of the hundreds of political prisoners, the policy of super-exploitation, unemployment and misery of the great masses. If the Chilean people could really choose today between military dictatorship and freedom, they would sweep away the junta and with it the powerful national and foreign corporation owners it serves."

"The masses have no other road than that which they are following: to organize themselves to overthrow the dictatorship and freely elect a popular and revolutionary democratic government with the participation of all the forces that contribute actively to the overthrow of the military junta."

SOCIAL SECURITY TAX: HOAX ON WORKERS

An alleged shortage of money in the Social Security Fund has resulted in new legislation which was approved by both houses of Congress and signed by the President as the year 1977 came to a close. The government, press, and media proclaimed that the new amendments to the Social Security Act will rescue the fund from bankruptcy for the remainder of the century. In reality, a greater hoax has not been imposed upon American workers since President Johnson created the Battle of Tonkin Bay. This latest hoax is not a cover for sending American workers to fight in Vietnam, as was the case with Johnson's, but rather a cover for increasing the direct taxes on the workers to support the government's expenditures and correspondingly reduce the income taxes on corporations and the rich.

INCREASES IN TAXES

The new law increases the amount of social security taxes to be taken from every working person's wages. The increases begin in 1978 going from 6.05% yearly to 7.65% in 1990. This means that a worker earning \$11,000 (approximately the amount necessary to maintain a family of four according to the Labor Department's minimum standard) who paid \$628 last year will pay \$841 by 1990. He will in fact be paying much more if his wages keep up with inflation, and the new social security taxes admittedly will add to inflation. As in the past, the Social Security tax rates on wages and salaries under the new law, are matched for employers and for workers, each paying the same amount into the U.S. Treasury. The difference is that the worker carries the full burden of his share; he never even sees it because it is taken out of his wages by the employer to pay Uncle Sam. Also, whereas the worker is not permitted to deduct it for income tax purposes, the employer is allowed to deduct his share as an expense of running his business. As a result, he gets back about half of what he paid out by reduction of his income taxes. And additionally, the employer may compensate for the tax increase by raising his prices.

One of the major reasons the Social Security Fund finds itself running out of money is the high rate of unemployment that has persisted since the economic crisis began in 1974. With 10 million workers unemployed, there are no social security taxes to be collected from or for them. In addition, the higher taxes on wages will obviously not encourage more employment; the boss will be saving more than before by cutting down on the workers he needs. The higher wage taxes serve only as a tool to make the working class support huge military and other expenditures of no benefit to the workers or their interests. During the 1950s and 1960s, the Fund amassed huge surpluses which the U.S. Treasury spent during the Korean and Vietnam wars.

THE HISTORY OF THE SOCIAL SECURITY SYSTEM

All this, of course, was not intended when the Social Security system was established in 1935. It was then heralded as one of the most progressive measures of the period, designed to end poverty and dependency. The 30's was the most class-conscious period in the history of the

working class of the U.S. It was a time when the workers were demanding by voice and vote, demonstration and strike, the right to jobs and decent wages, the right to unionize, the right to unemployment benefits, decent housing, education, and health care. And it was a time they were demanding measures guaranteeing economic security when they reached old age, a right that was expressly granted in the Social Security Act of 1935. During the depression, every working class family and almost all families from the petty-bourgeoisie had a relative forced onto home relief. For the working class, it was obvious that workers who had spent their lives building this rich country should not be thrown on the scrap heap and left to depend on charity. In that light, when Franklin D. Roosevelt pushed through the Social Security Act of 1935, it was not merely an act of generosity on his part. Rather, if he was to legitimize his government in the eyes of the people who elected him, as well as hold in check the rising militancy and revolutionary potential of the workers, it was necessary that he respond to their just demands and make good on his promises.

The Social Security Act was rushed through Congress in a matter of months. The Act provided for a special Social Security Tax of 1% on both employers and workers. The opponents of social security legislation, then as now, argued that it was necessary for workers to share in the tax payments for their own dignity, to feel that the benefit payments were a matter of right and not charity. The 1% tax passed, disarming the opposition, permitting early passage of this crucial law.

WHY A SOCIAL SECURITY FUND?

The original law also provided for a Social Security Fund, again disarming the opponents of the social security legislation led by the insurance companies who insisted upon "sound business principles." An insurance reserve is absolutely necessary for a private company to assure its ability to pay the benefits insured, whether life insurance or pensions. But the U.S. government's ability to pay depends not on what money it accounts for as a "Reserve" or Fund, but on the amount of money it can collect from its people through its taxing power. The Social Security Fund is thus only a book-keeping device which tells us that, while the fund was continually growing, the payroll taxes collected from workers were larger than the Social Security payments paid out to retired workers; that the tens of billions of dollars collected in payroll taxes were not needed for social security benefits and could be used for other purposes, such as by the U.S. Treasury to pay for the huge wars and military defense expenditures and for the growing interest on the public debt. When, in recent years, the Social Security benefits became larger than the payroll taxes collected, the opponents of Social Security quickly raised the cry of bankruptcy. And now the President and congress have accepted the hoax and joined the perpetrators in giving them what they want, increasing payroll taxes until 1990, so that the President can recommend the reduction of other taxes such as corporate taxes by which the opponents of Social Security will be rewarded.

ESCAPE CHARGES AGAINST AGRON DROPPED

Salvador Agron escaped from the educational release program at Fishkill Correctional facility in Dutchess County, New York, just 8 months before he was due to receive parole. The conditions that pushed him to do this expose once again the nature of the penal system in this country and the urgent need for reform.

During the 18 years he spent in prison for the murder of 2 white youths during a rumble in 1959 when he was 15, Agron became a student, an educator and a spirited fighter for prison reform. He began classes in January 1977 at New Paltz University after having been granted clemency pending one year in the prison's educational release program. Despite his almost certain release after one more year, Agron was forced to flee for his sanity from the "schizophrenic existence" of being free during the day, and a prisoner at night.

The conditions he faced in prison—the beatings, strait-jacket confinement, solitary confinement, massive overdoses of tranquilizers, and being forced daily to submit to strip searches and rectal searches by guards who said: "You murder us and we send you to college"—further delineate the dehumanizing nature of the "correctional" facilities which purport to prepare these prisoners for society.

But illusions fostered by this institution are typical of a system which negates the most basic needs and interests of its victims and society at large. The few reforms that have been won through struggle—such as the educational release program—are undermined and dismantled in their implementation by guards and prison bureaucrats who constantly work to see that these reform measures prove failures. In this context when prisoners are able to gain some benefit from these programs they do so in spite of the personnel and administration at the prison who



make every effort possible to destroy physically, emotionally and psychologically the inmates. In order to achieve the effective functioning of these programs the organization and struggle of the prisoners is indispensable as is the education and vigilance of the people re-

garding the implementation of these programs. Experience has shown that penal reforms are sabotaged as soon as the level of organization and struggle inside as well as outside the prison diminish or cease, and that the most brutal and inhuman methods that form an integral part of the penal system, continue to be the rule.

Agron, despite attempts to crush his efforts, has witnessed growth in social consciousness as his poetry demonstrates:

"Call me what you please...
I work and fight for the poor.
I must continue like this until you understand
That someday I will return
To pick up the struggle where I went wrong..."

Agron was on his way back to New York when he was arrested in Phoenix, Arizona. Because there are no provisions for "fleeing due to psychological harm," the defense had to structure a temporary insanity defense for Agron stressing the fact that the conditions he faced clouded his judgement and forced him to his flight. Thus, on November 19 after two weeks of an intense trial the jury reached their verdict: not guilty by reason of mental disease.

Because of the verdict, Agron was sent to Hudson Psychiatric Center where he must be evaluated to establish whether he is dangerous to himself or others. When that is done he will be released to Fishkill Prison once again where he awaits application for parole. The next parole board meets in March and then again in May.

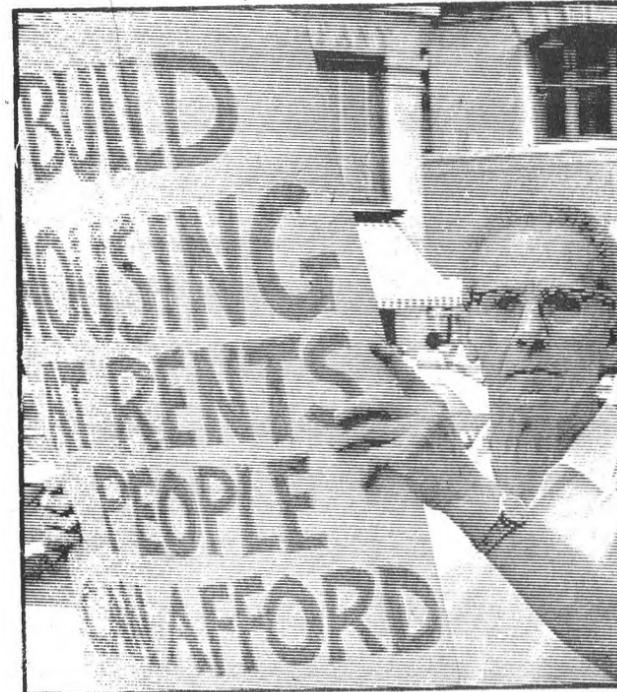
The case of Agron is not unique. Its importance lies precisely in the fact that it is a glaring example of the oppressive and inhuman conditions that millions of prisoners suffer in the penal institutions in this country. His case points to the reality that in a society where profits dictate at the expense of the needs of the people, as under capitalism, its institutions respond to the interests of capital. In this society the real enemy of the people, the authors of the daily and systematic violence against the working class (physical economic and psychological violence) are not found in the prisons but are the owners of the banks and monopolies. Meanwhile the real victims of their domination, find themselves subjected to the most brutal forms of exploitation and oppression as is the case with millions of inmates in U.S. jails.

The struggle for better conditions within penal institutions are part of our struggle to transform this society into one free of exploitation and oppression; one where the true enemies of the people and humanity will find themselves jailed.

We urge all progressive individuals and organizations to take up our responsibility to educate the class around the case of Agron and its significance and to participate in the struggle to secure his freedom. We urge you to send letters and telegrams to the Parole Board demanding his release.

Letters and telegrams can be sent to:
Edward R. Hammock,
N.Y.S. Parole Board Chairman
Building #2,
State Office Building Campus
Albany, New York 12226

TENANTS DEMAND LOW-INCOME HOUSING



During the 1950s, the New York City administration began to concern itself with a developing trend in the city's economy: the loss of more and more jobs to the city, resulting from the move of industry to places where labor costs were cheaper, rents were lower and tax benefits greater. In addition, those sectors of the population with greater economic mobility were also leaving, particularly people working in the professional and managerial jobs of the departing industries. To stop the flight of industry and the flight of the petti-bourgeois sectors of the population, the city designed a "master plan" with the goal of transforming the core of the city—Manhattan—into an area that would attract and sustain the petti-bourgeoisie. Areas of the city were projected to undergo complete class and racial transformation to insure this would happen.

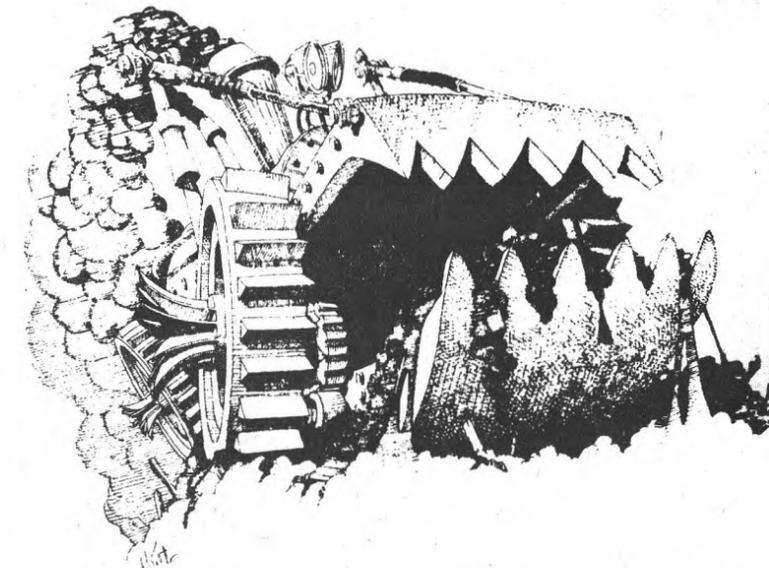
A 20-block area in the Upper West Side of Manhattan was selected to be the testing ground for this urban renewal policy. In 1956, this area contained approximately 18,000 families, 67% of which were low-income. These poor and working class families—overwhelmingly black and Latin—began to be moved out of the area with the "promise" that they would be allowed to come back once the new buildings were constructed. These families were relocated to the ghettos of Brooklyn and the South Bronx where housing and all services were in much worse condition than in the West Side.

The moderate and upper-income buildings going up brought into the area those professional and managerial sectors the city desired. Many of them began to buy up old, rundown brownstones for less than \$25,000; with low-interest loans from the city, they renovated the brownstones into buildings worth more than \$90,000 today. To insure that their investments in private property were protected, in 1962 these elements formed an organization,

CONTINUE (Committee of Neighbors to Insure a Normal Urban Environment), with the goal of keeping the poor and working class—particularly minorities—out of the community. CONTINUE represents the most racist and reactionary forces in the community. With the courts of law and other government agencies on their side, these forces have insured the relocation of 9,500 working class families from the West Side community.

During the 1960s, CONTINUE kept a very low profile in the community. The city was clearly advancing their interests as property owners and there was little organized reaction on the part of the tenants. In 1970, however, conditions changed. The squatters movement burst onto the scene in the West Side Urban Renewal area. Ever since then, CONTINUE and other racist petti-bourgeois forces have waged a furious battle to expel the working poor from the area.

To get an idea of the ferocity of their attempts, one has only to look into the court case brought against the city by Trinity Episcopal School. Located in the WSURA, Trinity is a private school, whose Board of Directors include people directly tied to (if not part of) the ruling class of this country, such as Charles Bluhdorn, head of Gulf and Western; Glover Johnson, chairman of the board of Schaefer Breweries; and William McGill, president of Columbia University. In 1970, families desperately needing low-rent housing occupied vacant apartment buildings on a street right across from the Trinity School. After much struggle, involving many people in the community, the city agreed to build low-income housing on the site, and so the families left the buildings. Immediately, Trinity School brought a case before the federal courts charging that the projected apartments would devalue the school's properties and would "destroy the fabric of the community." CONTINUE joined Trinity in the suit. The overtly racist nature of the case aroused the anger of the liberal forces at Trinity and this past summer, the school finally decided to drop the case. CONTINUE however, decided to take the case up on its own. For eight years, the petti-bourgeoisie has manipulated the "legal" system to stop vitally necessary housing



from being built on that block.

THE PRESENT STRUGGLE

In 1973, federal funds for Urban Renewal were halted. The working class of the Upper West Side was given a respite in the war to remove them from their neighborhood. With the arrival of the Carter Administration, however, funds were once again allocated to the city, which geared its machinery up to finish the "cleansing" of the area.

Many of the tenants on the 9 remaining Urban Renewal sites also geared up for the struggle. Last summer, a number of families together with several community activists came together to form the United Tenants Association (UTA). At public hearings held in October and November before Community Planning Board #7, UTA presented a comprehensive proposal for the rehabilitation of 20 buildings in the 9 sites. The rehabilitation would take place under the direction of UTA in a city-sponsored self-help program called Community Management. In the hearings, CONTINUE presented no proposal, but it supported all those private developers whose proposals were designed to attract the upper ranks of the petti-bourgeois and at the same time increase property values.

The final decision of the board several weeks ago gave UTA 106 apartments out of the 232 it proposed to renovate. This means that more than one-half of the units on the 9 sites will go to private contractors. The rents in these apartments will be "fair market", i.e., whatever the market can bear. These rents will go as high as \$600-700/month. The Planning Board did pass a resolution reaffirming its commitment (first declared in 1962) to the construction of 2500 low-income units in the area. The resolution is clearly absurd, however, since the Board voted against the actual construction of those units.

THE WORK AHEAD

The Board's decision must now be approved by other levels of the city administration. The final decision is made by the Board of Estimate. In this first round of the present struggle, UTA and the working class community on the West Side of Manhattan received some hard blows. The fight is not over, but the UTA has a long road ahead of it in its struggle to win low-income housing.

In the next period, the UTA must deal with 3 factors. Most immediately, the UTA must consolidate itself organizationally and structurally. Much more organizing work must be done with the tenants living on the 9 sites. Secondly, the UTA must develop a fightback strategy that is more long-range than merely planning for tomorrow and next week. Part of this long-range view must be the expansion and consolidation of UTA support by other sectors of

the working class as well as by progressive petti-bourgeois forces. This is particularly important in the light of CONTINUE's recent attacks on many UTA supporters (who in their own right are leading activists in the struggle for equal and quality education).

Thirdly, and most importantly, the UTA must come to understand that a program like community management can in the long run only betray the interests of the working class. Under community management, the tenants assume responsibility for building maintenance and repair. To cover the rising costs of maintenance, the tenants will have to raise their own rents. Eventually the rents will reach levels that the tenants cannot afford. In the end they will have priced themselves out of the very buildings which supposedly they control. At the same time, community management diverts the attention of the masses away from the government. Rather than demanding that the government meet its responsibilities to provide people with decent, affordable housing, the working class instead will be desperately trying to figure out how to pay back the bank loans to the tenant corporation. The UTA must demand that the city administration provide low-income public housing.

As a Marxist-Leninist organization involved in this struggle, we have the responsibility to insure that UTA consolidates itself and begins to deal with the weaknesses we have posed here. Without a strong mass organization led by honest and principled members of the working class, the struggle for housing on the West Side will falter.

In addition, we have the responsibility to raise within UTA the fact that the struggle for low-income housing is not a fight isolated to the West Side community. UTA needs to begin to establish contacts with housing activists and groups in other parts of the city who are fighting for a similar goal. In order for these groups to make their demands for decent housing from a position of strength, they must begin to develop coordinated work. At the same time, the struggle for housing is not and cannot be separated from other struggles for democratic rights—education, healthcare, daycare, etc. Thus, both within each community and eventually at the citywide level, we must begin to raise demands which bring to the fore our common interests as workers and thus give a perspective which unites us in our common struggle to defend our democratic rights and against all attacks on our standard of living.

In unity lies the strength;
In the workers lies the power!



Members of U.T.A. at Community Board meeting.