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Contents

	Page
The Black Struggle Today and Our Tasks, by Andrew Pulley.....	3
Steelworkers Workshop.....	9
Building Trades Workshop.....	19
Report to the Branch Finances Workshop, by Mary Scully, Lower Manhattan Branch.....	29

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THE BLACK STRUGGLE TODAY AND OUR TASKS

by Andrew Pulley

Yesterday Derrick Morrison presented a broad analysis of the experiences of the Black struggle over the last 20 years. In this report, I will zero in on the conjunctural state of the struggle for Black liberation and what we as socialists are doing and can do to help build the struggle.

As Derrick has pointed out, the Black struggle made some impressive gains over the last two decades. Blacks have fought successfully to end the Jim Crow system which denied the most elementary democratic rights, such as the right to vote, the right to eat where one pleases, the right to determine what toilet to use, the right to run for office.

At the same time, despite these changes, despite the fact that Black people now stand formally equal before the law, despite some gains in higher education and job upgrading, in general the living conditions of the masses of Black people have not significantly improved and are in fact worsening.

Blacks are the greatest victims of the economic problems which face all working people today. If the working class in general is dissatisfied at the deteriorating quality of "the American way of life," if they are angered by inflation, growing unemployment and general insecurity, then that just tells us that the Black masses are even more dissatisfied. I think this is reflected in the fact that Black workers have played a big role in many of the important strikes of the recent period, such as the San Francisco city workers strike and the Baltimore sanitation workers strike.

Other examples of Black dissatisfaction can be seen in the fact that Black women are playing an active and leading role in the Coalition of Labor Union Women. The development of the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists is also an indication of the dissatisfaction of Blacks and is an attempt to effect some positive change.

Some of the clearest examples of a desire to beat back the attacks on the Black community can be seen in the small but important demonstrations against police brutality.

We have seen disillusionment with the police not only on a local level but nationally, with an increased consciousness of the repressive role that such agencies as the FBI play. The image of the FBI has been greatly tarnished since Watergate revelations of the Counterintelligence Program "to disrupt, destroy, and otherwise neutralize" the Black liberation movement.

It has long been suspected, but there is now proof, that the government, through the FBI, plotted to crush the Black Panther Party. There is proof that the government had an interest in "neutralizing," we can say getting rid of, Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, and in destroying Black organizations and civil rights organizations.

The Watergate revelations have deepened Black people's suspicion of the racist capitalist government and the parties that comprise it. It is doubtful the ruling class

can nullify this fact by trading in Nixon for Ford, a man who missed no opportunity to oppose every bill in congress that had any semblance of being a gain for Blacks and other working people. And Ford has already pledged to lead the attack on the Black community by continuing the cutback in social services.

I don't know if you have heard the most recent news. We now have a proposed new vice-president. Mr. Energy Crisis himself, Mr. Imperialism, and Mr. Butcher of more than 30 Attica prisoners—Nelson Rockefeller.

It is doubtful this new addition will do much to alleviate the doubts among the masses that this government is run by the majority of people. I read an article in the *Lorain County Journal* where a reporter sought the reaction of people to the Rockefeller appointment. One person responded, "It sounds like a corporation merger, Rockefeller and Ford. . . . It shows who runs the country."

Worsening Situation

A recent report of the Bureau of Census illustrates the fact that things are getting worse for Blacks. The Census Bureau reported that the income gap between Blacks and whites is widening.

As Derrick pointed out yesterday morning, so long as the capitalists and their agents continue their rule, there will be no end to the oppression of Black people. Notwithstanding the formal equality Black people have in many respects before the law, racist police still shoot and beat on the heads of Black people, both young and old. Notwithstanding the end of the Jim Crow system, Blacks are still at the rock-bottom of society. This will continue to be the case because the economic and political role of racism is too profitable for the capitalists.

It is true that some Black people are "making it" into higher income brackets, but for the masses of Black people things are getting worse, not better.

Four reasons were given by the Census Bureau for the decline in the proportion of Black income to white: 1) a decrease in the number of multiple earners in Black families; 2) a sizable decrease in the number of Black working wives; 3) an increase in women heads of families, who are paid less for the work they perform than men are; and 4) a decrease in the number of Blacks who are elevated to higher paying jobs.

But what's behind these four factors? I think there are two basic reasons for them.

1) In the face of growing inflation, the American bourgeoisie tightened the money and introduced recessionary measures which meant more unemployment of Blacks in general who, as we know, are the last hired and first fired. In particular, this meant that Black women would be the first of the first to be fired. Therefore in families where both the husband and wife worked—which is a large percentage of the Black community—the family income is drastically cut.

The unemployment situation hits families with multiple

wage earners particularly hard. In most cases, young people are wage earners in families in this category. Young people are fired and laid off at even a faster rate than Black women.

2) The other basic reason for the widening income gap between Blacks and whites is the permanent drive by the rulers to increase their profits by reducing the standard of living of the masses. This has been done by attacking the most unorganized sections of the working class, the Black and other oppressed nationalities, and women—those layers of the working class least able to defend themselves.

The drive against affirmative action for Blacks in jobs and the drive against quotas for hiring more Blacks are examples of racist attacks aimed at *reversing* the gains of the Black movement. Derrick spoke of the Supreme Court ruling on the Detroit school desegregation plan. There have been other racist court rulings. On August 7, the New York State Supreme Court ruled that the regulation requiring holders of New York City contracts to hire more Blacks and other workers from oppressed nationalities was invalid. There was also the Supreme Court ruling last spring which stated that the financing of education on the basis of property tax is okay. These rulings constitute a strong wind in the sails of the racists.

What is the response of the Black community and the Black movement to this situation? An important thing to keep in mind in this regard is that there is a growing recognition on the part of many Black people that the solutions to these problems can be made only on the governmental level.

What is needed, for example, is a government that will allocate billions for education with Black people controlling those educational institutions. Black people need a government that will not invalidate quotas for hiring more Blacks in the interest of keeping the construction and other trades as white job trusts. Black people need a government that will institute preferential hiring and provide jobs for all.

Afro-Americans need a government that sees the elimination of the slums and their replacement with modern low-rent homes as a top priority. Black people need a government that will reduce the work week without a reduction in pay, in order to employ the entire work force and also permit greater leisure for the working masses. A government that eliminates the police forces that carry out racist violence against the Black community and replaces them with a Black community-controlled force. A workers government is what Black people need.

No Alternative

Because of the crisis of leadership in the Black movement, the Black community sees no alternative to the capitalist parties at this time. They see no alternative to the capitalist politicians of both the Democratic and Republican parties. This is why over 2,000 Black capitalist politicians have been elected, including 108 Black mayors. And some of the biggest cities in the country have Black mayors. Atlanta, Detroit, and Los Angeles are cases in point.

But can these mayors and other Black officials solve the problems of Black people while serving the bankers

and industrialists? Blacks can check out the experiences of Carl Stokes in Cleveland and Kenneth Gibson in Newark to see if their counterparts in Atlanta, Detroit, L. A., or other cities have the solution to Black oppression.

In both cities, Cleveland and Newark, Blacks are still plagued by rotten housing, rotten and overcrowded schools—if you can call them schools—higher unemployment, lower wages, and rampant police brutality.

It was not the purpose of Black Democratic mayors such as Stokes and Gibson to advance the lot of Black people. Their role was and is to pacify the Black community in the interests of white big business. Stokes explains this in his book *Promises of Power* where he says, "Clearly, I was a 'safe' candidate. In back of their minds, those white men [Cleveland businessmen] believed that if they put me out front they would be buying off the ghetto." Of course, it was not the Black community that was bought off. It's pretty difficult to do that without greatly improving the living conditions of Black people. It was the recognized Black leadership in Cleveland that was bought off. And many of those who refused to sell out were locked up or intimidated—or even killed, as in the Glenville incident. Stokes described how this was done in one instance. He said, "I want you to work with me, cooperate with me. The extent to which you will, I am going to help you all I can. But when you go past me, you better understand that I am going to step back and you are going to have to face that white cop."

What comes across crystal clear is the carrot-and-stick approach the bourgeoisie uses in dealing with the Black movement. A few grants if you sell out the Black struggle. The wrath of the racist white cop if you refuse.

The role Stokes played in Cleveland is being repeated by other Black Democratic mayors. In Newark, police have been harassing Black militants of the Congress of African People and the Black and Puerto Rican communities in general. In Atlanta, Black youth have continued being slaughtered by the police decoy unit. And in Detroit, in spite of the abolition of STRESS, there is still racist police brutality against the Black community.

How can these mayors stop the racist repression of the Black community? How can they advance the Black struggle? Even if they wanted to solve the problem they can't because these mayors, just like the white mayors, execute the will of the powers that be—the bankers, landlords, industrialists, and other millionaires. In fact, the ruling class backs Black Democratic mayors precisely because they feel this is the most convenient way to rule the masses of Black people. That is, to make it seem like Black people are controlling things through Black elected officials and to keep the Black community looking to the capitalist parties to solve their problems.

It is for these reasons that the SWP and YSA are campaigning and pushing forward so energetically the idea that a party that represents the working class is needed. In our socialist election campaigns we aim to convince Black and other working people to break from the parties that administer their oppression and to support the party—the SWP—that represents their class interests. We support the building of a mass Black party and a labor party based on the trade unions because the development of either would signify the political awakening of the working class and Black people to the fact that

they have interests that are antagonistic to that of the ruling class, and they must organize politically against the parties of the ruling class. This would signify an awakening to the fact that Black and working people need to be about the business of organizing to get governmental power.

The problems that Black people face are so deep, so fundamental, that only a socialist revolution can put us in a position to solve them. A labor or Black party would be a step in the direction of the construction of the mass revolutionary socialist party that is indispensable for Black and labor emancipation.

There is an obvious crying need for independent political action by the working class, but unfortunately the trend in Black politics over the last period has not been in the direction of independent political action. Two years ago at the Gary convention we saw a lot of interest in independent Black political action. 8,000 people were there to discuss how Blacks could organize to affect the political process in the interest of Black people. It was a very militant and enthusiastic convention. But unfortunately, due to the leadership of the convention, no orientation toward building an independent party came out of the convention.

At the time of the National Black Political Convention in Little Rock in March of this year, Black nationalist leaders like Baraka and Owusu Sadaukai continued to place qualifications on their support of the idea of an independent Black party. They presented the concept that it is not time to build a Black party, that in order to build a Black party you have to work through the Democratic Party. It was a tactical question, they said, because this is where the Black masses are today.

The Little Rock convention was much smaller than the Gary convention. Only about 1,800 attended the Little Rock gathering. I think there are three reasons for this. First, fewer of the original prominent Black Democrats participated in it, such as Diggs, Stokes, and Fauntroy. These politicians now feel they no longer need the likes of Baraka and the convention to help them bargain within the capitalist parties to enhance their influence. These politicians who have "made it" view this whole thing as a liability.

Second, many of the more militant Blacks who attended Gary were disillusioned with the fact that not much was being done by the Black Assemblies which had been set up at Gary. And they were disillusioned with the rightward retreat of the Black Assembly leaders on such questions as busing and the Middle East.

Third, this year is not a presidential election year. The conference wasn't built like the Gary convention and it was held in an out-of-the-way place.

Members of the SWP and YSA joined with a number of other delegates at the Little Rock convention in supporting a resolution for the formation of a Black party. We worked with other delegations, mainly Georgia and Wisconsin, who agreed that Black people should break today from the capitalist parties. We took a pedagogic approach in discussion with the sisters and brothers not only about our view of the need for an independent mass Black party, but about our overall perspective for socialist revolution.

The Stalinist Communist Party took a different posi-

tion. In their press they praised the fact that the Black party resolution was tabled. And they praised the role of the Black Democrats.

The Communist Party hailed the election of Coleman Young as being a workers victory. Their concept of independent political action is to continue working in and around the capitalist parties. They use the terms "workers victory," "anti-monopoly coalition," and "independent political action" only to dress up their position of class collaboration in the interests of the Soviet bureaucracy.

SWP Perspective

Given the existing situation in the Black community, what is the program and perspective of the SWP in regard to the Black struggle? Most importantly, what are we doing today to help advance the struggle?

Our perspective, unlike that of the Communist Party, is one of socialist revolution. Our revolutionary perspective is reflected in everything we do. We never equivocate on the needs of the oppressed. We are champions of the struggle of working people and the Black community. We help build this struggle and advance a program that can lead it forward.

We see ourselves as part of the militant leadership that must be built if the struggle is going to go forward, a leadership that understands the necessity of political independence from and opposition to the ruling class. We participate in and help give leadership to any struggle that helps increase the organization and confidence of the Black community, educate Black people about the nature of this society, and win gains for Black people.

What are some of these struggles we've been involved in in the past year?

I said earlier that the trend in Black politics over the last period has been one of continued support for the Democratic Party. This is true. But we have seen a continued radicalization of Blacks and we have seen independent struggles on the part of Black people. They haven't been massive struggles of the type referred to by Derrick during the civil rights and Black Power days in the '60s. The independent actions over the last period in the Black community have been modest in size, but there have been a number of them, especially against police brutality. And there has been more activity on the part of Black workers.

We have been involved in many of the struggles taking place. The activities have varied from area to area, but to give you an idea of what some of them are I'm going to list nine of the struggles in the Black community we've been involved in. Many of these are struggles we want to continue to be involved in and help lead in the period ahead.

1) We have played a role in many actions against police brutality.

2) We have been involved in many defense cases. One of the most important ones nationally has been the Attica trials which will be coming up soon. September 13 has been projected as a day for defense activity nationally. We want to help build these activities. We are also participating in defense cases in St. Louis, Los Angeles, Milwaukee, Boston, and elsewhere.

3) We have helped build actions in defense of the struggle for independence on the part of the people of Angola, Mozambique, and Guinea-Bissau.

4) We continue to play a role in the fight for Puerto Rican, Chinese, and Black community control of the schools in New York's District 1. In Boston our party has helped fight the upsurge of racist pro-segregation actions in the schools. In Washington, D.C. we helped build the demonstrations of Black students and teachers against the attempt to liquidate Federal City College, a Black college.

5) Members of the party are helping to build the Coalition of Labor Union Women. We have participated in the National Black Feminist Organization, and have been active in demonstrations against cutbacks in child care.

6) In Houston and San Francisco we have helped organize support for the striking nurses and the municipal workers. We also participated in the convention of the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists.

7) We have participated in and want to continue to involve Black people in protests against repression in Chile, Korea, Iran, and, of course, in whatever actions or teach-ins that develop in response to Zionist terror and war against the Palestinian people.

8) In Brooklyn we've been actively supporting the defense of the 100 Haitians who have been seeking asylum in Miami and who the U.S. is trying to deport.

9) We have published and publicized the COINTELPRO documents, and have mounted an offensive against Watergate-type attacks.

I want to elaborate on our Black work in the following areas: 1) the struggle against police repression; 2) the struggle in defense of the Portuguese African colonies' right to immediate independence; and 3) our general propaganda work, election campaigns, sales of the press and literature, and our response to the Watergate revelations.

1) The struggle against police brutality. Blacks in many cities have protested police repression. Most of these actions—with the exception of the large action in North Carolina organized by the Stalinists—have involved under 3,000 people. In a number of these actions, the party has played an initiating and leading role. In Los Angeles we worked with Black community groups to organize protest actions against the terrorism of the L.A. cops in the SLA slaughter.

In Oakland we've been active in the Tyrone Guyton Justice Committee. This committee has organized a series of protests demanding the cops who murdered 14-year-old Tyrone Guyton be indicted and convicted.

In the protests in Atlanta we have been able to work with SCLC's Hosea Williams and other forces to carry out some significant struggles against police brutality.

I want to make several important points about cops and how we have responded in the above-mentioned cases. The way we respond to the police stems from our appraisal of the role these bandits play. That is the role of the protectors of the powers that be on a day-to-day basis to keep working people and Black people in their places in capitalist society. In the communities of the oppressed nationalities, these bodies of armed men—and a few women—in blue constitute an

occupation army.

Of course, we are not interested in reforming this force to enable it to be more effective in its racial and class repression. We are for dismantling the police force and replacing them with a Black and worker defense force. That's what we want to do. But until we are able to do that, we want to do everything we can to organize Black and other working people to expose and tie the hands and feet of these perpetrators of racist violence in the Black community.

Now, just one other thing in this connection. Unlike the class-collaborationist bureaucrats in the unions, and also unlike the Workers League and the CP, the SWP and YSA do not view cops as members of the proletariat. We are totally opposed to their presence in the union movement. And we do not support their strikes, whether they are members of AFSCME or any other union. Their strikes reflect temporary misunderstandings between the oppressor and his hired thugs.

2) We have played a leading role in the protests organized in the past several months against Portuguese colonialism. Black organizations have responded to our initiative in defense of independence for the Portuguese colonies in Africa. Broad sponsorship has been obtained in New York and other places for these small but important protests.

If the Portuguese continue to refuse to grant independence to their colonies in Africa, we are going to want to continue the role we've played in this area in the coming period. In order to do this, we may have to disagree with some in the movement who think the fight is over, for example, the *Guardian*. The YSA has produced an attractive button demanding "Portugal out of Africa now," which we can use in conjunction with this work.

3) Our propaganda and educational work is crucial. It is the means by which we reach the masses of Black and other working people with the only realistic perspective that can solve their problem—socialism.

This propaganda consists of sales of the press and literature, holding forums, touring speakers, and running election campaigns. In the past period we have taken a big step forward in reaching the Black community with our views by selling our press. Through our election campaigns we provide an alternative and challenge to the policies of the capitalist class. We are setting the example for the masses to act politically in a class-against-class manner.

We want to take our socialist campaign to the unions, plant gates, campuses, high schools, and Black student unions and seek their support. We want to urge those who claim to support independent political action to support the SWP and not the capitalist parties.

One very important thing we have done in the past period was reprint the COINTELPRO documents which exposed the government crimes against the Black movement. The party advanced the call for an independent Black commission of inquiry into those crimes. In Houston our candidate for governor, Sherry Smith, led a delegation including Black activists who had been victims of FBI harassment to the mayor's office demanding the mayor disclose police files on the movement.

Some prominent Blacks, such as Reverend Jesse Jackson, have called for an investigation into the murders

of King and other Black leaders. The *Atlanta Voice*, a Black newspaper, reprinted an article by Baxter Smith from *The Militant* along with portions of the COINTEL-PRO documents.

Because of our suit and other initiatives on our part, we have won increasing Black support for our Watergate suit. I think the fact that the *Black Scholar* requested and printed an article by Baxter Smith on the government plot to crush the Black movement illustrates the point that we have won new respect for our initiatives. Also, there is the endorsement of our suit by Imamu Baraka's Congress of African People and the fact that one of the editors of *Black Scholar* has agreed to be a member of PRDF's Advisory Board.

Another very important part of our Black work is getting Pathfinder literature into the hands of Blacks who are looking for a strategy that can end oppression. In the last period we have sold much socialist literature to Blacks at the many conferences we've attended. The Little Rock convention, the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists, the National Alliance Against Racism and Repression, the African Liberation Support Committee conference, the Conference of African Women—these are some of the Black conferences we participated in recently.

We want to continue this practice of attending every Black movement conference we possibly can. And there are some more projected. We are helping organize a Black Unity Conference in Milwaukee. We will be participating in the national convention of the Pan-African Students Organization of the Americas in New York next weekend.

We want to use our press, campaigns, and street meetings to reach out to the broad masses of Blacks and "talk socialism." We also want to reach the more conscious young radicals, both those who are today open to the ideas of Marxism and those who are not.

A new layer of Blacks who are open to Marxist ideas includes people who have been active in the African Liberation Support Committee and its predecessor. They are in or around the Youth Organization for Black Unity (YOBU) and the Congress of African People (CAP).

In the past they have considered themselves pan-Africanists; followers of Amilcar Cabral, the murdered leader of the Guinea-Bissau fighters; Nkrumah; and other African leaders. They have in general rejected Marxism in the past. They figured because Marx was European and white, his political perspective had nothing for Black people. They rejected out of hand any concept of classes as the basic way society is divided. To them the race question was the fundamental question.

Because of a number of factors, this milieu has changed its view on Marxism and its relation to the Black liberation struggle. Among the factors has been the inability of the Black mayors and other Black elected officials to solve or even advance the lot of Black people. The fact that Black conditions in Newark, Gary, and Cleveland deteriorated under Black mayors has led some nationalists to conclude that more is involved with Black oppression than what meets the eye at first glance. People like Baraka, Sadaukai, and the membership of YOBU now see that there is both class and racial oppression of Black people in the United States and that socialist revolution is called for.

Another factor that is responsible for this change of mind among this layer of Blacks is the impact of the African liberation struggle and its existing organizations and leaderships. Most of the liberation groups have and do read Marx, Lenin, and Mao, as well as African militants, to guide them. The fact that those countries Black radicals look to in Africa as being models of societies to fight for have failed to solve the problem of imperialist oppression and have failed to industrialize and increase the living standard of the masses has also had an influence. Countries like Tanzania and Ghana are cases in point.

About a year ago a discussion began in the African Liberation Support Committee on which way for Black liberation. There were two main views expressed in the internal documents of the ALSC. One view held that Black people are oppressed solely as Black people and solely because of our Blackness. The other view held that Blacks are oppressed both as part of the working class and as a nationality. At the outset, the anti-class analysis position was held by Baraka. And the class analysis position was held by YOBU and some who considered themselves Maoists.

At the ALSC conference last May a discussion on these questions was held. About 350 people attended. The majority agreed that Black people were oppressed both racially and as part of the working class, and that Black people would need allies in the struggle against capitalism. Baraka changed his earlier position and supported this view.

This represented a big change in attitudes in the direction of Marxism. People were open to Marxist ideas, even though some were under the influence of Maoism. They equate Maoism with Marxism, for the most part out of ignorance. They are not hostile to Trotskyism. This fact is reflected in the amount of literature we sold at the ALSC conference. Over \$300 of literature was sold in a two-day conference of about 350 people. Many pamphlets on Maoism were sold. And the attitudes of people toward us was generally friendly.

We have a fraternal attitude toward this layer of people. We want to work with people like Baraka, Sadaukai, and this general milieu in united front actions around a variety of questions like Chile work, the Portuguese colonies, and others. We want to continue to discuss with them. For example, we have been invited to participate in a panel discussion on Watergate that is being projected by the Congress of African People. We want to continue this kind of fraternal relation with them wherever possible.

There are also many other groups and individuals who are interested in Marxism. We can hold classes designed to attract this layer of people, classes on Marxism. We can participate in Marxist study groups with them, even if they have confused Maoism with Marxism. We'll be able to win some of them over to our program and perspective.

To sum up, what will our activity consist of in the next year? First, we want to continue the kind of initiatives we took in various actions during the last period, such as anti-police actions, actions for immediate independence for the Portuguese colonies, actions against various cutbacks. We want to be involved in and support

any significant struggle that breaks out. We want to be where the action is. We also want to continue our education, agitation, and organizational work.

A word about the African Liberation Support Committee. As you know, the party and YSA have played a role in this committee and the ones before it. We played no small role in making some of the actions on African Liberation Day as large as they were.

Last May most of the ALSC actions were small and not really focused on Africa. Instead they raised questions on the energy crisis, dumping Nixon, and racism and imperialism in the abstract. The character of the ALSC has changed. It is no longer a united front around defense of the southern Africa struggles. It is a general "anti-imperialist," "antiracist" organization. To

the extent this group carries out effective activity, we want to relate to it. The nature of the group will vary from area to area. We want to approach the ALSC and try to get it involved in whatever action develops around Portugal's African colonies, as well as any other activity, because the ALSC is a general Black group.

Our activity in the fight for Black liberation over the last period has taken a step forward. In the period ahead we can take another step forward. If we are audacious and aggressive in getting out the revolutionary socialist program to the Black community, and if we continue to participate in and help lead struggles against aspects of Black oppression, if we persist in this spirit, then we are bound to make increasing gains in the coming period.

STEELWORKERS WORKSHOP

Following is the transcript of the discussion in the steelworkers workshop held at the Socialist Activists and Educational Conference, August, 1974.

FRANK LOVELL:

A brief listing of our forces in steel doesn't sound very impressive at this point, but we think it is a very good beginning. You'll get a better appreciation of the nature of this beginning and what prospects there are when you hear the reports by comrades from the different areas who are involved in work. We will begin with comrades in Chicago where we've done the most work and where we have quite a bit to report.

CHICAGO:

Within the steelworkers union there has been unrest at the district level with regards to the recent elections. Probably the most significant of this concerned the Sadlowski campaign versus Sam Levitt, the incumbent, in District 31.

Sadlowski is a young trade unionist who was formerly president of my local, Local 65, and he has a reputation for being an honest trade unionist, wanting to fight grievances justly and not just throw them out the window, etc. He has a very large following in District 31, the largest single steel district in the United States. It runs from Hammond, Indiana, almost all the way to Milwaukee. All of the major steel mills and steel companies are included in this southern ring of steel mills on Lake Michigan.

In District 31 there were massive election frauds in practically every local. This is well documented by the Sadlowski campaign and it has raised a major stink — it was a Watergate in District 31. And as a consequence of the activities that were carried out — the election fraud, misuse of union funds, etc. — Sadlowski was able to mobilize literally thousands of steelworkers on several different occasions to demand new elections which will be held probably at the end of September or the first part of October. The date has not been set.

He gained support not only within the mills but also from forces outside the union, the liberal milieu in Chicago, on the slogan "honest trade unionism." This is quite significant and large numbers of steelworkers, both Black and white, are supporting his campaign on the issue of union democracy.

Others will be able to report more thoroughly on these developments; I have not been active in the Sadlowski campaign.

The second part of this report is about the two conferences that have taken place in Chicago sponsored by the District 31 Right to Strike Committee. Recently the International union, at the instigation of the companies and the U.S. government, has made two very basic attacks on steelworkers.

First is the taking away of the right to strike by the Experimental Negotiating Agreement (ENA) as part of the recent contract that we got in May. It took away the right to strike on all national issues, and for all practi-

cal purposes it took it away on local issues such as health and safety conditions too.

The second attack on workers was directed against Blacks, Latinos, and women. This came in the form of a *consent decree*, another gang-up job by the steel companies in collusion with the government and the bureaucracy. It cuts across the widespread dissatisfaction with promotional practices inside the mills with regard to Blacks, Latinos, and women. It's a very complicated legal maneuver, but essentially it does nothing to ameliorate the problems that Black, Latino, and women steelworkers have.

There were two conferences held in Chicago to discuss these two issues. The first was held on Memorial Day weekend. The second was held last weekend; we attended the first day of it. I'll explain later why we didn't stay for the rest of it.

The purpose of the conference was twofold. One was to draw together all the disparate, anti-ENA, anti-consent decree, and anti-bureaucracy forces. I might add that there have not been very many forces crystallized into any cohesive organization. The second part was an intervention in the national convention this September around the issues of the ENA and consent decree.

The first conference accomplished basically two things. First, it drew up a list of resolutions it wanted to introduce at the International convention against the consent decree and against the ENA. It put forward positive programs for women's rights, for the rights of Blacks and Latinos, and it also drew up a set of resolutions dealing with general health and safety problems.

The second purpose of that first conference was to call another conference as the convention approached. The second conference was held last weekend to discuss out some additional resolutions that were brought up.

This second conference was for two days, but we attended only the first. The first day was for steelworkers only and discussed the different strategies and tactics for carrying out this type of intervention at the convention. The first conference was open, a democratic-type get-together where everyone had the right to speak and votes were taken and generally it was a good atmosphere. The second was not nearly as good. October League dominated it politically and thought that since their resolutions were passed overwhelmingly at the first one they had the right to bureaucratically ramrod their tactics and strategy for the convention at the second conference.

As far as the floor intervention at the USWA convention goes, not a large number of delegates were elected in the locals around the country to carry out the task that the conference put forward. And as a result of this the general ultraleft orientation of the Maoists tended to dominate the conference. The result is that they are calling for a demonstration outside of the convention. And with the kind of slogans they are raising, they are probably going to get the steelworkers who are going along with them into a premature fight with the Abel machine.

The composition of the first conference, to give comrades a rundown: there were about 200 people, 40% women and 30% Third World. Most of the participants were young with a few notable exceptions. The organizations and political groups who were represented there included: first of all, most important, and probably the closest thing to genuine rank-and-file organization, the RAFT organization from Youngstown. They have control of the local in Youngstown. The second organization was the Ad Hoc Committee which is a group of Black steelworkers there; they have quite a bit of support in the Youngstown area. Also, there were Black organizations from Baltimore and Pittsburgh.

The political tendencies included the October League, Revolutionary Union, the Communist Party USA (Marxist-Leninist) regional organizing committee, or whatever it is. Our party had observers there, and the CP had observers there.

The second conference was quite a bit smaller than the first one, and the percentage of women and Blacks declined.

This is a basic report of what exists. I hope we can have more discussion about it.

FRANK LOVELL:

There will be at least an hour for discussion, but we would first like to have the reports.

Ordinarily we don't participate very actively in caucus formations such as Steelworkers for Change in Chicago. The Steelworkers for Change caucus originated as an opposition slate in the recent elections in Local 65. In this particular case our participation was limited, I would say. We helped put out most of the literature of the slate. We helped to a limited extent in the operation of the campaign headquarters for the slate, but beyond that we didn't have any other comrades in the local at that time. Of course, in the activities we sold *The Militant* and distributed our own socialist literature. And as a result we recruited one worker who has spent quite a number of years in the mills. That's a pretty good record and speaks well for the comrades who were in the caucus. Because the caucus was narrow and, as you have heard, was riddled with all the sectarian groups, the opportunities for constructive work were limited. In that kind of squirrel cage we came out quite well.

The result, however, since the local election is that of all those steelworkers, nonpolitical or apolitical steelworkers who were attracted during the election campaign, most were very quickly alienated from the caucus. Partly because there is not much interest after the election, but in this case largely because of the foolish antics of these sectarian groups. So they end up with themselves, and we have no reason to participate further in that formation.

This Steelworkers for Change was associated with other rank-and-file groups in the union in the midwest, from Pittsburgh to Cleveland, to Lorain, to Youngstown.

I'm going to ask our comrades from Pittsburgh to report now on some of the things that are happening in the mills. They will probably be able to fill you in a little further on the attempts at forming a broad caucus around the issues of the ENA. As I say, we can have questions afterward.

PITTSBURGH:

As you know, the branch in Pittsburgh is a relatively new one, and as of a couple of months ago we didn't have any comrades in steel. I will talk about what is happening in my mill which I believe is symptomatic of things happening in other places or may foretell what is going to be happening in other places. My mill is special, as I'll explain.

It's a mill of about 4,000 people and about 1,000 of those are in production, maintenance, and coke work. This coke work supplies all the coke and almost all the gas, which is a by-product in the coke process, for all the U.S. Steel mills in the Pittsburgh district. It also supplies some of the coke for the U.S. Steel mills in Chicago-Gary. So it is a very key operation. And you can bear in mind for the rest of my talk the point that if this works shut down, the U.S. Steel operations in western Pennsylvania can be slowed down or stopped. It is an essential operation. The workers realize it, and the company realizes it.

The composition in the coke works is interesting in that it's about 90% either Black or young. It used to be an almost all-Black area because the coke work, like the blast furnaces or open hearth, are the dirtiest, hottest, and most unpleasant jobs in the basic steel industries. And they were the jobs that Black workers got. In the last five or so years there has been a lot of hiring of new workers. They have been in the main young white workers. So you have this situation where there are very few middle-aged workers; there are a lot of older Black workers, some younger Black workers, and young white workers. This makes for a somewhat more radical work force than in the other mills.

At any rate, I guess most of you know that this year we have steel contract negotiations, and the possibility of a strike nationwide is precluded because the so-called leadership of the union has signed the Experimental Negotiating Agreement which eliminated the possibility of a strike throughout the steel industry. And this agreement has now been extended until 1980 so that the possibility of a nationwide steel strike is technically not possible.

In the ENA one of the things that Abel heralded was that we cannot have a national strike, but we do have the advantage of being able to have local strikes. In other words, before the ENA you couldn't have local strikes; the national issue was settled and local issues were sort of brushed under the rug. As a result local issues never were satisfactorily settled anywhere; they just kept piling up. This time Abel said that if you had local grievances or local problems you could go out on strike, assuming you get the permission of the International president, which is a big assumption obviously.

But this is not really such a great boon when you think that if you're in a mill that is a marginal operation, the steel companies can let you be on strike from now to doomsday. So it is only an important possibility if you are in one of the key operations. The company realized this and there was a special supplement signed to the national agreement dealing with the coke works which in essence extended the ENA no-strike agreement to our mill.

So before we even got started, the possibility of a

strike at our local plant was eliminated, although not surprisingly they never did tell the lower-level officials and certainly not the rank and file about this special supplement. We sort of learned about it at the last minute.

Again, the union, the workers, and the company realized that coke works are among the unhealthiest and unsafest, probably the unhealthiest and the unsafest of the steel industry. And coke workers had the belief, and even the lower-level bureaucrats had the belief, that this contract was going to have something special for coke workers. People were talking about a four-day week or six-hour day. All this was quickly wiped away. But everyone believed that there would be something in this contract after such a long time of nothing for coke workers. Pretty much, what was in this contract was a shaft.

All it says in this contract, in the appendix dealing with coke workers is, "Recognizing the continuing need for and concern for the health and safety of coke oven employees, it is desired that the control of coke oven emissions be considered a prime area of continued study by the coordinating committee of the steel companies consistent with present ongoing research and applicable government regulations. The companies agree to give serious consideration to the problems involved with this proposal during the life of the agreement."

The lower-level officials in our local were not aware of just what was going on behind their backs, and certainly the rank and filers in the coke works still had hopes that something could be done because they knew that local issues weren't settled.

What developed over the last month or two was a great anticipation on the part of the lower-level officials, and more so on the part of the workers, that something was going to happen, that we were going to get something one way or another. There was this sort of atmosphere of anticipation over the last two months.

In line with believing that something still could be done, the grievance man from the coke workers tried. He is a Black steelworker who, as present-day union officials go, is as close to good as you can get; at least in my opinion he is relatively honest and relatively militant, though by no means a socialist. He and his assistants called a meeting and discussed the situation and the assistants firmly believed that we were going to take a strike vote at this meeting; no one had told them we couldn't strike. The grievance man even had a notion that maybe somehow we could go on strike, and indeed this is what most of the workers thought the meeting was about.

What they didn't know, precisely what they didn't know, was that the agreement had no provisions for a strike but set first an August, then a September deadline for negotiating, after which point it would go to binding arbitration. But no one was aware of that.

So this meeting was called for a week ago today and the attendance was truly astounding, from my two or three years experience in the local. At most local meetings attendance would be 40 or 50 people out of a local of 4,000. At this meeting we had over 400 coke workers out of about 900 to 1,000 people in the coke works departments, so that it was just an astounding thing the way it evolved.

We discussed these developments as they went along,

in our branch. We didn't have too much anticipation, I think, that too much was going to develop. I think that we believed and I believed that this was a situation that had a lot of potential. And I think what happened at the meeting was instructive, for me and for all of us, as to the role the steel union plays in the steel industry and the present situation and level of consciousness of the rank and file.

Although we didn't know it at the time, it turned out that this meeting was going to be dominated by a man named Jim Smith who is special assistant to I.W. Abel and a man with some long experience in the labor bureaucracy. Smith gets up (there were three shifts of the meeting so that people could make it), Smith gets up at the first session and states unequivocally we cannot go on strike, at which point a pretty large uproar went up.

Through the meeting there were times when it looked like Smith was going to get thrown out. There was an enormous amount of hostility towards him and towards the local president who is an International man pretty much up and down the line, and even towards our grievance man just because he was sitting up there with the rest; although, to his credit, he did look miserably glum throughout this whole thing except when someone from the meeting would mention the word "strike," at which he would get a really happy grin on his face.

But Smith says right off the bat "no strike" and there was visible hostility. And yet that is about as far as it went. In other words, what was lacking was organization. Several people got up and said "to hell with you, on September 1 we're going on strike," or "we're going on strike tomorrow," or just "to hell with you." But no one was there, really, to say we need to do such and such to build an organization that could actually conduct a wildcat strike, which is what it would be.

This lack of organization was evident too among the lower-level bureaucrats like the grievance man and his assistant who, I believe, would also have really liked to have had a strike action. But they too had no organizational conceptions. They and some others had had experience with sanctioned strikes like the big 1959 strike. They had had some experience, especially the grievance man, with something short-term like a sit-down that might last an hour or half a turn. But they have never had any experience with really involving the masses of the rank and file in any organized activity. And this too was evident during the meeting and afterwards during discussions, that the grievance man and his assistants couldn't really come up with any possible alternative.

So this is where matters stand now. There will be another meeting September 1, although I don't really expect too much else will happen.

The rank and filers are even more disillusioned than before with the International union, and you hear more than ever before that they are getting ripped off for ten bucks a month in union dues. I don't know what will happen when they find that union dues will probably go up after the convention in September.

The low-level bureaucrats are pretty much at a loss and at this point there is no organized alternative. Indeed, I think this lesson is the most valuable lesson of this whole experience. If there are people in the mills

with a perspective for a class struggle wing in the trade union movement, there is in the steel industry, at least at the moment, almost a vacuum. And there is in the steel industry a rising militancy on the part of young workers and the Black workers. This may just come together in something, but at present there is no organization.

Just a footnote to what relates on this thing: the organized rank-and-file movement has never been strong in the Pittsburgh area. The dues protest movement, which was a movement against the increase in 1957 or 1958, did get its start in the Pittsburgh area, but it never really had a mass input. Indeed, the remnant of the dues movement is in RAFT.

There was a CP rank-and-file group that existed very briefly about a year ago. Again, it had no input from the rank and file. I don't think the participation of steelworkers from Pittsburgh at the conference in Chicago was very great at all. Pretty much that is where things stand at present. Again, almost a vacuum exists.

FRANK LOVELL:

We had another report that was written for this panel because the comrade who prepared it had to leave earlier this week. Another comrade will read it. It is from St. Louis.

ST. LOUIS:

I went over the notes and had a little difficulty reading the handwriting, but I'll just run down some things he wanted to say. He had to leave because he had to be back at work. His situation is in most ways different from ours in Chicago, but there are similarities.

He has carried out some activities in the St. Louis area, and some comrades from St. Louis may want to supplement and tell us a little more about what has been going on there.

One of the most important things they have been doing in St. Louis is selling *The Militant* on as consistent a basis as possible at as many mills as possible. They have had quite a degree of success. They also investigated the campaign that was being run against the International machine, I think this was about a year ago. And what they found out about it was that the opposition candidate was not trying to mobilize masses of steelworkers to support his campaign, to bring about some democratic rights in the union. Those are the two things I was able to glean from these notes. Comrades should bring up other points about what they have done there.

FRANK LOVELL:

These reports, in my opinion, don't really reveal the extent of the possibilities we have within this industry, except the one report that includes the recruits that we've made. We have one comrade here who was not previously political at all. He came right out of the steel mills and as a result of our participation in the campaign in Chicago has decided to join our party.

I think that is an indication of the changing mood and a greater degree of radicalization that prevails generally within the working class. We intend to pursue this. You will recall that in my original remarks I said that those candidates that ran in Chicago were a slate

of three which included one woman, a comrade who has been in the mill about fifteen years or more.

We have an opportunity now, as a result of new government regulations, to try to get more jobs for women in the steel mills. And we think it is a good opportunity, not only for some of our women comrades, but an opportunity for the party.

We're not suggesting that women or other comrades get jobs in the coke departments; I would not urge anybody to take that kind of a job. Our comrade had that job when we recruited him, and that's where he remains. And he has some ideas about the advantages of working there, but I think there are some straight disadvantages.

This is one of the problems we ought to discuss here, not what to do with one or another comrade or how many women comrades we should urge to find jobs in the mills (there will be several), but what we can do in a situation such as exists in Pittsburgh, where those workers have genuine grievances. He told me earlier some of the conditions under which they work in the coke ovens, and if most of us were there we would not stay. I wouldn't work in a place like that. I wouldn't urge others to strike or anything like that, I just would not work under those conditions. I hate to think that I would be in such a trap that I would have to endure such conditions. But capitalism traps millions of people; most of these workers are in that trap. And they will have to find some way to get out of it.

I don't think the traditional methods of the steelworkers union, especially with the blocks that are now put in their way to exercise the traditional methods, which is strike action—I don't think that is sufficient. Before they can do anything very effective they must find allies in the community, those against the environment's destruction. The whole environment in that area is polluted and the entire community is affected, not so immediately or severely as the people who work in the poisonous fumes of the coke ovens, but they do suffer and they have grievances against the steel companies. If our party can help the steel unions find some allies in the community, then maybe we can be instrumental in starting a very broad movement that will unite with the steelworkers and provide protection so that the steelworkers can then take decisive strike action. A strategic blow of this kind would be a really dramatic action. And now, with the changing moods and attitudes in the country, I would not think that is out of the realm of possibility.

We're not going to plan such action here now, but I raise this and introduce it, not for solution but just for comrades to think about, because increasingly this is the kind of problem we are going to be confronted with as our comrades get into the unions and begin to participate with workers and in the problems of working class communities. We will seek new methods of struggle, methods of struggle that are appropriate to the political juncture now, and commensurate with the organized forces of the working class, which are tremendous if only they can find some way to use their power. These are the typical problems that we'll have to be seeking answers to, finding ways to solve, finding ways to begin a solution.

Once we start, once we get a wedge going in some of these communities, such as this one, we'll find that the

workers and the community, the working class community, will be imaginative beyond anything we can conceive and they will come up with proposals and start actions that will provide leads for us. We have many examples of this in Dobbs's books, in *Teamster Power* and *Teamster Rebellion*, but the modern working class will, I believe, prove more imaginative and more resourceful than the workers of the depression.

The workers now have organizations. They don't begin with nothing; they have a great deal going for them now, once they realize it and once they realize how to deploy their forces and bring their real power into play.

That's enough of my thoughts. I imagine that many of you who are not steelworkers have questions, more specific questions, you would like to address now to the comrades on the panel. Joe, you have a report? Come up here and make it.

OAKLAND-BERKELEY:

Jeff just talked to me and I threw together a couple of notes. I'm a steelworker. As you know, probably the majority of steelworkers are not involved in basic steel. The steelworkers union covers much broader areas, canning and containers, for instance, and ore mines, and a large number of machine shops that have been organized. I happen to be in a local in Oakland, a machine shop. We have other comrades in this local.

ENA really doesn't apply to us in that sense. As of yet it's not discussed among rank and filers, simply because it doesn't affect us. However, if you read *Steel Labor* closely, Abel has intimated expanding ENA to other sections of the steel industry, probably containerization and mining. Copper mines just went on strike, which Abel doesn't like at all.

My USWA local has about 2,000 members. Because I am a shop steward I am on the executive board. So is another comrade who is head of the civil rights committee. We've been able to bring around us and be involved with a whole layer of young radicals in the union coming from the San Francisco shipyards, since our local controls the machine work on ships and building the ships which is down in this area.

We've been able to work with them on the union newspaper. It's been able to carry pretty radical ideas. In the last issue, for instance, we had an article on the labor party and the need for a labor party which was written by the president of the union. A motion for a labor party was sent to the District 38 conference on the west coast which covers, I think, nine states. It was brought up by the president of our union from the floor. It didn't make it through the whole sifting process which the steel union does whenever motions are presented; it sifts out the motions that aren't considered important. So the motion was raised from the floor, and the official report in *Steel Labor* says the motion received a great amount of discussion and over 25% of the delegates supported the motion. Frank McGee, who is head of the district, was opposed to it and pretty much cut off discussion, but it was an important sounding of certain feelings, especially in this era of Watergate.

The motion for a labor party passed in our union unanimously at a meeting of 75 people. And we've been able to get a large amount of discussion on it.

We work very closely with the business agent because

he is a young militant just elected from the jobs who overthrew a business agent of 17 years and has a lot of respect from the shop. He presented a motion without even consulting us on Chile, supporting the free trade union movement in Chile and condemning the coup, etc. He had a real fight and he fought the president, an International man, to a certain extent on this motion on Chile.

This local is sort of a maverick. It left the IAM in the 30s because the IAM refused to organize. It affiliated with the steelworkers after a period of time.

When I left, the shipyards were in negotiations. The shipyards are one of the few places where they have refused to include in their contract a no-strike pledge. And the company wants to get this in. There are a number of unions involved in work in the shipyards, from Teamsters to Longshoremen, and all of them have this no-strike/no-lockout pledge; steelworkers are the only ones that don't have this pledge and have refused to accept this pledge, and the company is trying to get them to accept it. Just as I left they were talking about striking because the company wanted to have this written into the new contract, a no-strike/no-lockout pledge. They were going to strike over it.

They had a walkout about three months prior to their contract negotiations over grievance buildups; this shook the company up over the importance of the no-strike/no-lockout pledge. They won their grievances. When the machinists go out the shipyards just go down. You have 4,000 people working down there, and when 300 machinists walk out the place shuts down very quickly. That's all.

CLEVELAND:

I work for Republic Steel which has its world's headquarters in Cleveland. In Cleveland we have this flatland in the center of the city where U.S. Steel, J and S Steel, and Alcoa plants are located; it is huge. The whole center of Cleveland is full of steel plants. And little, smaller companies work with all the stock that is processed, making it into the various small things that they do with processing. My plant alone has about 4,000 to 5,000 workers involved in various operations of processing.

The character of my particular plant, and I assume that it is true of all other plants in that area, is that whole departments are white workers and whole departments are Black workers. My department, for instance, is almost all Black workers, and in that department most of the workers are very susceptible to radical ideas and will say they are against the ENA if you explain it to them. About 50% of the workers are Black and very few women, because of the attitudes of the unions and the workers themselves.

But the most striking thing for me at my first union meeting was when they told us what we got in the new agreement. That's the way they expressed it.

We have a Black local president who doesn't say what he thinks of ENA. He has it read to the membership and then says this is what we have. And all these union members were just waiting for someone to say something. But no one did, against the ENA. They said a lot of things, but nothing against the ENA or against ratification.

My branch organizer suggested I get involved in some of the RAFT meetings about a month-and-a-half ago, and we are in the process of doing that, finding out where they are, doing some research work.

About three days before coming here there were several steelworkers distributing a RAFT leaflet which was very well done, with about five points which steelworkers who were going to build a left movement would be campaigning for—I'll go over those in a second—outside the major gates into Republic Steel. I got a leaflet myself; I got my leaflet fourthhand and knew that at least twelve other guys had seen this leaflet before I had.

The demands on the leaflet were simply that the ENA was selling out your right to strike and that you have no ratification. The union is being weakened by someone making all the decisions for the steelworkers.

There is a great receptivity. Although no one said anything at our union meeting, everyone is sort of waiting. In a sense, everyone had an idea of what was going on but no one expressed it. They were waiting for the union leadership to say this ENA is a bad thing, but all that happened is it was read out, because the officials were too scared to say they supported it or that it was a good thing.

PITTSBURGH:

I was involved in some of the discussions around the coke works and the possible walkout. I want to reiterate something Frank has brought up and something that did occur to us in those discussions considering the prospects for that walkout and what it would mean.

The obvious weakness was the lack of organization; there was not the organizational muscle to carry this thing through given the odds against the workers, particularly the union bureaucracy. But I think the strongest part of what was happening there was the issue that they were thinking about, and that is the issue of health and safety in this plant.

As Frank pointed out, this issue has a very broad appeal and has potential, I think, of relating to the whole community. And when we discussed how we would participate if there was a wildcat, one of the first things we thought we could do would be to publicize this issue and help the steelworkers reach the community. Because maybe they wouldn't immediately think of it. I know most strikes are pretty narrow, or at least there is a great deal of difficulty getting good publicity for a strike.

One thing people may have seen in the recent issue of the Machinists journal is a list of 13 poisonous substances, one of which is coke-oven emissions which cause various kinds of cancer. Of these 13 emissions there is only one that is being investigated. Asbestos got a lot of publicity in the rubber plants. But there has been little mention of the other 12 substances. Some of them are extremely dangerous and endanger hundreds of thousands of workers, millions of workers. And the article went on to point out that there was a Watergate in health and safety, that some of the industrialists who had violated these health and safety standards were also contributors to the politicians' campaigns and so the government didn't want to step on their toes.

I think this health and safety issue will become more and more important. Just in the last year or two we've

really begun to discover how dangerous some of these substances are that people have been working with day in and day out for years.

In the shop I work in, an IAM shop, there is a tremendous list of health and safety violations that we keep going back to the company again and again for, and the company puts us off. Just yesterday there was a walkout in the shop, a wildcat. I don't know whether it is still going on. It's a small shop, so it's not going to be extremely significant. It was over the question of not enough oxygen and bad ventilation in one of the areas of the shop. The machinists went out too, and it got TV coverage, but we'll have to see how significant it becomes.

CHICAGO:

I just had a question. I know that in Chicago Stalinists are very much involved in the steel union. I wondered if the people giving reports could elaborate on the role of the Stalinists.

PITTSBURGH:

I have some firsthand experience with Stalinists. In Pittsburgh in general, and in the steel mills in particular, they are a shell of an organization. They don't do anything to speak of. They have had as many as six people in steel in Pittsburgh; about four remain. Their main approach is to support good bureaucrats as opposed to bad bureaucrats. One of the people they backed most strongly was the former president of the Homestead local, a guy named Ray Anderson. He was a McGovern Democrat who did such a bad job running his local that he was overwhelmingly defeated when he ran for reelection. But because he was a McGovern Democrat who bucked the International a very little bit on Abel's policy of non-alignment in the '72 elections, the CP said this was the kind of guy they wanted to work with and support.

There is one Stalinist in my own local who is not a coke worker but in the rolling mill. We have not as yet elected our delegate to the convention at the end of September. He was talking about a rank-and-file slate. I should put "rank and file" in quotes, because his idea and his party's idea of a rank-and-file slate is, again, bureaucrats who don't get along with the bureaucrats in power at the moment. The politics in most steel unions is just a question of cliques, the ins and the outs, and the main difference between them is that one group is in power and the other isn't. And so the Stalinists' idea of a rank-and-file slate is a bloc with the outs to get in.

The Stalinists in Pittsburgh have some contact with National Steelworker Rank-and-File, which is the CP group. It is pretty much a paper organization. For example, one of the three national chairmen of National Steelworker Rank and File, is a Black steelworker by the name of Ray Henderson who is in Pittsburgh, who never even goes to National Steelworker Rank and File meetings. His name is just on the letterhead. And that is pretty typical of their rank-and-file organization.

There was a local rank-and-file organization, Steelworkers for Democracy, which I worked with for a while. For some reason, unknown to me, they didn't see fit

to tell me when meetings were held, so I wasn't involved in that for very long. It went from having twenty to twenty-five people in the space of a couple months to having about three or four. They let it just die away. So they are not doing much in that line.

One of our comrades was involved in these conferences in Chicago; they decided not to have anything to do with the conferences in Chicago and that is pretty much their policy, although when they saw that the first conference was pretty well attended they sort of came around.

SEATTLE:

I work at Bethlehem, and there's not much going on there. It's a small plant of roughly 1,000 people and they work around the clock. Most of them are working in the neighborhood of 48-plus hours a week.

I'm working nightshift and am unable to make most of the meetings, but I was able to attend a meeting last February. RU had about three people there and were involved with some positive things, like with the Farmworkers where they put through a resolution supporting the Farmworkers, and on no-strike they put through a resolution to be sent to the west coast conference. With reference to the Farmworkers they did their typical ultra-left thing; they were leafletting right on the plant grounds, naturally, so they were kicked off and they were hassling with the guards and got into a scuffle.

I don't know about other Stalinists. There is someone who works there who was in the 1965 split from the SWP and is in Freedom Socialist Party. The CP is there also, I am sure, but you never see them.

[Question asked about composition.] I would say it is about 10-15% Black and is as comrades describe; the Blacks are in the harder, lower paying jobs. Generally speaking, there are younger people in those areas also. I work out of the electrical shop which is a little less radical milieu, more older people. The percentage of young workers is fairly high, I would say in the neighborhood of 40%. There is quite a high turnover. One week I worked four different shifts in one week, and it is really ridiculous. But I guess it gives an idea of the strength of the union there.

NEW YORK:

I have seen in the NOW newsletter that NOW was interested in and had some contacts with women steel workers, and they mentioned Pittsburgh, Chicago, and Baltimore as the center group. They didn't lay out their strategy other than using their legal and defense fund to bring legal challenges against specific practices. When I went to the NOW convention I particularly looked around to see if there were some steel workers. And I was informed that probably the next president of Chicago NOW is a steelworker and that they have a nucleus of women, at least in Chicago and Baltimore, that have been working in steel for a number of years and have joined NOW. NOW seems to be a little bit more interested in working women's issues. They are also working with some Sears women on issues, so I thought maybe the comrades in steel would be sensitive and see if NOW is doing anything. They did put out a button, "steelworkers NOW" but they didn't really distribute them widely.

Some steelworker women are Black.

QUESTION:

I have a question for the comrade who attended the Chicago rank-and-file conferences. Could you give a little bit more detail about the RAFT Youngstown contribution and their relationship at the second conference to the sectarian groups like October League?

CHICAGO:

The composition of RAFT is by and large middle-age white. I believe some of the leaders were around our party at one time. The role that they played has to be taken into consideration with the whole conference itself. It's an ultraleft conference and an ultraleft formation. RAFT is probably the most healthy element in it. But they all have a substitutionist approach. They don't see ways of mobilizing masses of steelworkers into action and as a result they go along with this demonstration at the USWA convention that is going to be called on the boardwalk, which won't amount to much.

Hopefully, sometime in the future we will be able to turn this situation around and draw the healthy elements into a class struggle approach. That's what we're doing now, discussing out the basic problems and the beginning of understanding what is happening in steel.

I'd like to go back to something raised about NOW and women in the steel industry. The only organized opposition to the consent decree above and beyond this conference that we've seen is that the NAACP initially filed a suit against the consent decree which involved Black workers and women workers with regard to promotional practices. And it was subsequently joined by NOW. They had one representative at the conference but did not play that much of a role in the conference itself.

One of the other things, in line with what Frank was saying about how the modern American working class is going to have to be very imaginative, especially when they have the obstacle of this bureaucracy, one of the things we have talked about over and over again in our classes on the labor movement is how we see the bureaucracy and how we deal with it. The relationship of the coal miners and steel workers is very obvious, and the miners now have a reform leadership. One of the things they are doing is reaching out for all kinds of support for their strike, especially in the Pittsburgh area where there is close proximity. We ought to watch that and see what they are doing. This is one of the ways, even though steelworkers don't have the right to strike, to make the bureaucracy look pretty bad. If the miners ask support it would make the bureaucracy look pretty bad if they would turn them down, and we should watch for that kind of development.

RAILROAD WORKER, NEW YORK:

My question was on the point raised about women in the steel industry. I also understand that the Birmingham and Sparrow's Point agreements are not being implemented, and I would like to hear some comments on that. What is the mood, what are the ideas of comrades in steel, what is the talk in the ranks, and also about the AT&T agreement?

FRANK LOVELL:

Who knows about this? There has been some material in the press, but beyond that I don't know anything.

PITTSBURGH:

I don't really know too much about this, but in our mill at least they are taking steps to implement the consent decree that instituted plant-wide seniority as one of the key factors. They have set up a committee of management and union people to help implement the program; the government has been down, and they have had open sessions with anyone who feels they have a grievance under that. They've informed most of the minority workers of their rights and opportunities to transfer into other departments with greater seniority retention.

A number of the more conscious workers, our grievance man being a good example, don't like the consent decree any more than NOW or NAACP, and they are still talking about it. Of course, according to this consent decree if you take the back pay, which may be \$500-700, and the job transfer rights, you have to sign a release that says you won't file any further action on discrimination. So you're signing away all your rights, basically just for \$500-700. A lot of the people have been hesitant to do that.

CHICAGO:

I think you have to look at what the consent decree represents, at least this is my opinion of it. There is wide discontent among Blacks, Latinos, and women about not being able to go into the better paying jobs.

So what happened was that the steel companies got the government to sue the steel companies and the bureaucracy for being racist and sexist. Only, in the consent decree it says the steel companies and bureaucracy don't admit to being racist or sexist. The process involved in implementing this is so cumbersome that they don't actually claim to do a damn thing. If something is done about it, it has a dangerous side to it too, and we have to look at it very closely as to what our relationship is to it.

[Question asked whether anything done at South Works.] At the last union meeting where it was discussed the presentation given was that nobody knows how this is going to be implemented. I don't know if comrades in steel have seen it, but it is all just legalistic mumbo-jumbo and refers back to this paragraph and from date of contract in that paragraph. So even assuming that they would implement it, nobody seems to know what it is all about.

So that is why I think it was just an attempt to cut across the growing sentiment against the promotional practices inside the plant.

But it is also very dangerous in another way.

FRANK LOVELL:

Have they introduced plant-wide seniority? I heard that there was a letter that came around signed by Sadowski and others on this matter.

CHICAGO:

Yes, but they haven't implemented anything; they have just sent out the letter saying we don't know how we are going to implement it, and that the government, the company representatives, and the union bureaucrats have been meeting day after day. You can't call and find anything out down at the union hall because they are always in meetings discussing the interpretation.

[Question asked whether any workers have attempted to transfer.] Not at this point, at least as of Friday; I don't know what they have done this week. They haven't done anything because they are still trying to figure out what it really means.

PITTSBURGH:

I think it was only scheduled to begin on the first of August and with this new bidding procedure, for departmental bidding, it is a complex two-stage procedure. First the job sequence is opened to that department and then the entry level jobs are open to the plant. So they have to post the job twice. And posting takes fourteen days and another couple of weeks to figure it out, so they haven't really had a chance to work it out in practice, although they do seem to be implementing at least that part of it. It will take two months to follow one bid through.

FRANK LOVELL:

I probably shouldn't have taken the liberty to interrupt as I did. You have some further remarks, don't you?

CHICAGO:

It's just that the consent decree can be very dangerous; there is another side of this question. A lot of white workers are opposed to this consent decree; a substantial number of white workers are opposed to it for racist and sexist reasons. We're opposed to it because it doesn't give oppressed minorities and women enough. They've suffered too long and they haven't been given enough. But the bureaucrats have the potential of mobilizing this racist and sexist sentiment against the consent decree. So it is their ball game right now.

QUESTION:

The institution of plant-wide seniority, even with its imperfections, would be a big gain. We should be a little more careful about saying we are opposed to it. We should see how it develops. Obviously we don't say the consent decree is what we want or what was needed. What is the sentiment in most plants among white workers?

PITTSBURGH:

It is true that they really resent it. There is not a lot of harassment at the hall, but any time there is an announcement about it on the bulletin board they say this is discrimination in reverse.

CHICAGO:

When I said we are opposed to it I meant we are opposed to it for two reasons. One, it doesn't give the oppressed steelworkers enough. And also, it takes away the right to file further grievances on the basis of sexism or racism.

FRANK LOVELL:

After the consent decree was negotiated and signed and approved in federal court and by different departments of government, the NAACP and NOW announced that they were filing law suits against this consent decree. Where those suits are now I don't know, and it is very difficult to find out. Baxter is here. He's been trying to

get the brief filed by the NAACP, without any success. So my guess is that they will proceed with this consent decree. The manner in which they do will certainly influence the attitudes of many workers.

If they go ahead and open up plant-wide seniority it seems a lot of workers would say "Well, I'm going to move out now into another department." And if they go ahead and give workers \$750 (most get closer to \$250) because of past discrimination and low wages that they would otherwise have collected, they will take it. If they went into the courts and got a judgment and those wages were calculated, they would get several thousands of dollars in some instances, but they have no assurance of this outcome.

What the consent decree involves is an agreement between the corporation and the union approved by the court which sets aside a lump sum—I think about 3 billion dollars or 30 million, a lot of money—which is to be divided among those workers who have been discriminated against. That's what the argument's about.

(Question asked whether the party has a position on the consent decree.) We have none yet. We've written about it rather cautiously in *The Militant* and we're trying to get more information. We'd like to get the brief that the NAACP has filed. We have the consent decree, a copy as signed and approved. We would like to get the brief that has now been filed, but we don't know where those are in the courts now.

VOICE:

One thing on that. The Ad Hoc Committee that works out of Youngstown is also opposed to the consent decree and has some sort of action going in Birmingham concerning the consent decree and its limitations. I don't think it is connected to the other suit but it is some sort of court action.

CLEVELAND:

In my plant it has already been implemented. It means that Black workers who have been forced into a department for 30 years and had their pay set at that department either because they couldn't get into another department without losing their twenty-five years experience, or even within the department could not get into a subdivision because somehow they formed a department there, are now able and are sitting down with a list to see where they want to move to anywhere in the plant. I work with Black workers.

[Question asked whether any have moved yet.] I haven't seen any move yet, but they have a seniority list saying they can do it and the union will help them.

FRANK LOVELL:

This is what we want. We have to get this information from the mills. We can't get it out of newspapers; that information is not reliable. It tells us what organizations like the NAACP and NOW are doing; it tells us what the corporations and government are doing. This consent decree was approved by the labor department and approved rather reluctantly by other government departments and agencies. There is not complete agreement on it within the government departments.

But what is happening in the mills is valuable information for us which we would like to report in *The Militant*. For example, if there are workers who have in

fact transferred under the consent decree, if plant-wide seniority has been initiated, and if plant-wide seniority can be initiated without accepting the consent decree; that is another thing, I should think. As we all agree, plant-wide seniority is a very big gain and I'm sure it is recognized as such by all Black workers and especially those who have been in the mills for fifteen years. That is separate and apart from the back pay that has been denied them.

So comrades who are in the mills, when you get back to work get whatever information you can, specific information with the names, if possible, of those workers who have transferred. And if you know them talk to them, take down what they say and let us know about that, too. Because this is a grey area. Quite a bit has been written about it by others, none of it very informative.

CHICAGO MEMBER OF COALITION OF BLACK TRADE UNIONISTS:

I think Baxter has this. The Coalition of Black Trade Unionists passed a resolution in support of the NAACP suit. I know that a steelworker who is either a Stalinist or very close to them in Gary, a delegate to the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists from that area, has been very much involved in this whole thing.

A question I want to ask—I don't know if it can be answered because of unclarity on this point—it seems to me that with plant-wide seniority people could take advantage of it without signing away their rights. It seems you need to sign to get the back money but not in order to bid. Is that correct?

PITTSBURGH:

It seems that plant-wide seniority is something instituted from this point, and the rest of the consent decree has to do with past practices.

QUESTION:

I wanted to know more about BACOSH and northern California, the local unions' relationship to it and our comrades' participation in it.

OAKLAND-BERKELEY:

BACOSH, Bay Area Committee for Occupational Safety and Health, was set up in the San Francisco-Bay Area to implement Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) laws essentially. It doesn't have the power to implement the laws, but what it has the power to do and what it has been doing is training workers to know exactly what the health and safety laws are and how they can go about getting these laws enforced.

BACOSH started out with having teach-ins in the East Bay covering all sorts of aspects of health and safety and putting out literature on this. The attendance at these meetings was 100-200 workers, probably 50% of them young, representing several different unions.

Over the period of the teach-in, which took about three months, they gained support from a whole number of unions including the 70,000 local of IAM which has its own full-time paid health and safety team which does nothing but walk around and make sure that these laws are enforced. The team is elected by the rank and file and is not a company team as many are. This has also been working with OSHA.

After the teach-in was finished, BACOSH began set-

ting up meetings with unions to train the membership on what has been going on. We had one of these classes set up with our union and approximately 100 people attended. Out of 32 shops in our local, 15 shops were represented by shop stewards, grievance men, and rank-and-file workers. It taught them essentially about the hazards in our shops which are mainly asbestos, degreasers, and noise.

We have one comrade who is in the same local as I am and is on the decision-making body of BACOSH.

But the whole potential of this has been very important, and just the number of people who have come around. In the six months since it was setup, it has probably contacted thousands of people who have come around it and worked with it, auto workers to longshore and IAM, steelworkers in the Bay Area. The business agent of our union is on the decision-making body along with a number of other petty bureaucrats from other locals. It shows the importance they are paying to BACOSH. And there is a certain amount of good rank-and-file interest in what health and safety rights are on the job.

I know that on my job it is one of the most talked about things. When, for example, we found that we were getting fumes in the shop, that the fumes of the degreaser were above the law's standards, the guys in our shop were ready to walk out over it and did file a grievance immediately.

FRANK LOVELL:

Let us understand this clearly. What is BACOSH? How did it come into being? What authority does it have?

OAKLAND-BERKELEY:

BACOSH illustrates the point Frank made about how there are various forms of struggle and sometimes we don't recognize them. Jack Rasmus is a young man who graduated college and decided he wanted to be a union organizer. He got a couple of friends he knew who were doctors and a few lawyers and a few unionists, and he put together a group. And he got endorsements from a few labor unions and a few labor councils, from a few more labor councils and a few more people, and all of a sudden he was conducting official classes. All of a sudden you had this committee with how many people coming to it?—100-200 people. Some of them were from

various levels of the bureaucracy and others were rank and file sent from their unions.

At this time we had a very reserved attitude although we went and found that other tendencies went too. We found that there was deep interest in safety. It was a group that had no official authority from any labor body, central labor council or anything else, and yet these formations develop. That is the kind of thing we should look at.

The same thing happened during the Sears strike. It was an eight-and-a-half month strike in San Francisco and we almost had a general strike in the city. And the group that conducted the support work for the Sears strike was not the San Francisco labor council or any of the Bay Area labor councils, none of the building construction trade councils and none of the official unions, but an ad hoc committee which had semi-official and official representation from all the unions, called the United Labor Action Committee, which our comrades played a role in.

The labor movement's institutions are not so hard and fast that we must assume that all action in defense of the class struggle is going to come from the current institutions. As was pointed out, motion in the class is going to come sometime from unexpected places where we are going to want to intervene, and I think BACOSH is just a small example of that.

FRANK LOVELL:

I think this is something that comrades in Pittsburgh will consider.

If there are no more questions or comments, let me say this, primarily to the comrades and the organizers where our steelworkers are. If we can get reports it will be very good. You have seen in *The Militant* that we have had articles on what is happening in the steel industry, and most of it comes directly from the field. We hope to continue that and increase it and get more specific information about some of these things that we have discussed here—the consent decree, for example. We have this big legal document and don't know how it translates in the mills at the point of production, and that is what we have to put in *The Militant*. Beyond that I have nothing more to urge of you at this time, unless there is some further comment.

BUILDING TRADES WORKSHOP

The following is the transcript of the discussion at the building trades workshop at the Socialists Educational and Activists Conference, August, 1974.

FRANK LOVELL:

One reason for this panel and general discussion this evening, this exchange of experiences, is to encourage everybody here, those who are active in the building trade unions especially, to send in reports to the national office. We promise faithfully to colate those reports and send them out in some form that will be useful to comrades in the field in all parts of the country, in the various branches of the party.

We should proceed now with reports by different comrades who are in building trades unions, so that we get a feel of the temper and moods of building trades workers and some appreciation of the problems that the building trades unions face here in this country at this time and what they are trying to do about them. (By "they" I refer to the officialdom of these unions.) What discussion is there among the membership about what should be done? Or is there any possibility of doing anything? How are the unions attempting to meet and cope with the open shop drive in the building trades industry? How is this affecting the unions in various parts of the country? What do the court actions initiated against the building trades unions in some areas mean?

How does the membership of the building trades unions interpret these attacks, and how are they preparing to resist them? What does it mean to the officialdom of the building trades unions; what is their response, especially those in the courts?— These are matters that interest us.

How are the building trades unions attempting to organize the unorganized workers, if there are such attempts in any parts of the country? There are some. I don't know if any of the comrades here have experiences from their particular locals, but there are some organizing attempts. How does the membership respond to these efforts? What advantages can redound to us if we participate in the union affairs at this time? How do we participate? What kind of union meetings are occurring today? These are all interesting and useful reports which will be made here.

We can generalize from our experience. Our collective experience will be different and more valuable than the experiences we have had in any particular locale at this time.

We should start with reports from the areas, and from that area where we have experienced the greatest activity. That's always the most interesting. I think comrades will relate to what is occurring in San Francisco and what we expect will develop there. In light of that we can generalize as to what we ought to do and how the party can begin to relate to this strata of the working class, which is certainly very different and in a different mood than that strata we talked about earlier this afternoon when we discussed the public work sector.

So we'll start now with a report from San Francisco.

SAN FRANCISCO:

We now have a number of comrades in the construction trade in San Francisco, in the painters and in the carpenters.

During the past year we met a layer of young building tradesmen who are starting to consider themselves militant in defending their interests and their union against the government-employer attacks.

The situation initially opened up in November with the rank-and-file strike against wage controls in the Northern California carpenters union. There is one bargaining unit for all of northern California, for the 46 counties, which involves some 40,000-50,000 carpenters organized into many different locals.

The bureaucrats deliberately left a certain opening for a show of strength on the part of the carpenters in San Francisco, in hopes of gaining a little leverage in their dealings with the government pay board on the cut in pay of the carpenters. Along with all the different building trades unions, they have suffered at the hands of the construction industry stabilization committee. They hoped that the whole matter of recouping pay cuts would be thrown in the courts. Bureaucrats took the carpenters off several jobs in San Francisco, initially.

The thing mushroomed out of their control because a layer of militants came forward and began shutting down *all* the construction projects. They formed a walking squadron to go to all the big jobs in town and persuade the carpenters to walk off.

There were in San Francisco 100-150 militants regularly participating in picket lines or picket activities and meeting in strike meetings, all of which were not that big, but some were. This lasted for months and ended when the bureaucrats made a deal with the employers to accept 10 cents of a 75 cent cut, and the promise of another 15 cents, and the rest to be decided in court. We were double-crossed. The other 15 cents fell through, the contractors refusing to pay. That is how it ended, essentially in a defeat.

In the end the bureaucrats just pulled the rug out from under the activities because very shortly after the thing began to mushroom the officials made attempts to gain control by sending some of their trusted toadies and by financing it at a certain level. So when it came time to call it to a halt they were able to pull out their support.

But the experience provided an opening for us to fit in and meet the militants participating in the initial activities. I became the picket dispatcher by simply taking on the responsibility and was able to meet a whole layer of militants involved. Even at that time we began to get out *The Militant*, meet a few people, and become known as socialists to the leadership of the strike committee which were radicals, some of whom had been in the party once.

Most of the militants were young. There were very few apprentices. Mostly carpenters who had been in the trade a few years. There was also a number of older militants, some were foremen and had respect among the men.

We were able to help them and have some discussions with them. We covered the developments in *The Militant*, and the coverage there, along with the other articles we have had in the paper about the government attack on the building trades unions, were put together in the pamphlet which has been invaluable to the work we have been able to do in the Bay Area building trades unions.

After that pamphlet was produced we began the process of distributing it to the militants. There is a significant number of militants from that strike who were again active and whom we met in the latest series of strikes this summer who have read that pamphlet. Many have also read *The Militant* through being introduced to it in the rank-and-file strike and through the period between then and the next strike and in the latest strike.

In this period between the rank-and-file strikes and the construction strikes this summer we organized to contact militants we had met and involve them in strike support activity, get them out on picket lines. We were successful in getting a number of them out, maintaining contact, having discussions with them.

The comrades in the painters local were able to raise a motion to support the Sears strikers and to have the local commit itself to picketing and other activity in support of the strike, and to an assessment of, I think it was, a dollar a month per member to support the strike. Although this was opposed by the chief official in the union, it was supported by the secondary officials in the local leadership and eventually passed despite the opposition.

We raised the exact same motion in the carpenters and that motion did not pass but the business agent did make a motion that we support the strike and give money; that was passed. He tried to table the motion of real, concrete support by making it a general show of support. This got a real response, especially from the militants in the union.

We held a class, a contact class on the strategy for building a left wing in the labor movement today and publicized it with a very nice brochure. It was publicized as a class by the Socialist Workers Party campaign coordinated by Nat. Weinstein, painter activist and candidate of the Socialist Workers Party. We sent this to a large number of militants. Through that, they were aware of our effort to educate militants and to take up the questions they were discussing and also aware that I was a supporter of the Socialist Workers Party campaign. Many were not aware of that until we started the class. We did get a few to come to one or another of the classes. We brought a few of the militants to a couple of different forums and we sold a number of subs in addition to our pamphlet.

Then, to bring it up to date, the strikes broke out throughout California, and the northern California carpenters were involved in these strikes. I am sure you have read the coverage in *The Militant*.

The bureaucracy did not leave much of an opening for militants to come forward and do anything in these strikes. In fact, their conscious policy was to demobilize the militants and the ranks of the union as far as possible, which they succeeded in doing. But a small opening was provided and we took advantage of it. The officials began the strike by settling with the Homebuilding Contractors Association. Most of the carpenters have to work

there and the union had to put the proposed contract to a vote in almost all the locals, which provided us an opportunity for writing up a statement explaining our view of the contract and a little of what was happening, explaining the attacks and our views of how to respond to it. We did this in a very popular way and entitled our leaflet "Don't buy a pig in the poke." It did get a good reception.

The most significant thing is that we were able to get 39 other militants to sign the leaflet, put their names and local numbers on it along with my name. So it was a real legitimate thing that was passed out.

The night before the vote we had militants come from as far away as other communities in the Bay Area. They had to travel quite a way, some picked up the leaflet.

We have opponents in the union (including some ultra-lefts), but I won't deal with them now.

FRANK LOVELL:

I looked at my watch and the reporter may have thought that was a signal to stop. It wasn't. We will have questions and discussion so comrades can learn exactly how we relate to what is happening right now in the building trades industry.

We are entering the building trades industry as party comrades for the first time in a long time, and it is a new experience for us, not only for us as individuals, but in a certain sense a new experience for the party. And it is also a new experience for the building trades unions. They don't know that yet. They are undergoing some experiences that they, or the officials, don't understand. And I don't think the membership understands very well what is happening, either. As a matter of fact, the vast majority of building trades workers in this country, approximately 70% of them are unorganized. This is the largest industry in this country. It is a \$100-billion annual industry. It employs about 3,000,000 workers.

The report about the strikes of carpenters in San Francisco did not mention that not all carpenters in that area were on strike. Many were. There are approximately 40,000 union carpenters in northern California. That's a big body of workers.

Those workers are the organized workers, but they are *not* organized. If they were organized they could come out as a body. The way the building trades unions are organized, it is impossible for all the workers to be brought out at one time. Not only for the workers in the building trades unions, but all the workers in a single union in the construction industry.

We are having some new experiences and we should begin our discussion at that level. We have comrades in the painters union in different parts of the country. We now have painters in San Francisco and will soon have more. We have a painter in Chicago who is completing his apprenticeship. He knows a lot about the trade, including some skills he doesn't get much opportunity to practice, because a mechanic gets few opportunities to practice the skills of his trade the way the industry has changed today.

Tonight we are going to have a report from one of our painters in New York who came into the industry largely through his own initiative and who has acquired within a short period of time some of the necessary skills.

His report is useful here, not only for comrades who are in the industry and in the building trades unions, but for those comrades who are not yet in the unions, who are only in the industry. It is also useful for those comrades who are not yet in the industry but are thinking about finding jobs. We will find out about how to get into the industry and what opportunities this offers for the party. I'm not sure the report coming up will answer all those questions, but I am sure you will get a first-hand account.

NEW YORK:

We developed a project that Frank alluded to in Brooklyn. We have a very close contact who is a longtime member of the painters who was in a position to get a number of comrades into the union. I was the first one, working for a non-union contractor with an eye toward getting enough experience to be able to change jobs once we had the connections and then getting into the union. It is something of a problem. I have two stories which will try to give a feel for the painters in New York.

Before I actually got into the union I went down to the district council and inquired about joining. They asked if I had a job. I didn't have a job with a union contractor at that point, of course, and said no. They said I had to get a job with a union contractor and then could join the union. So I asked for a list of union contractors, and they said it was out of print, and that they didn't know when it would be reprinted but that they did have a list I could copy some names off of, which I proceeded to do. On calling them up, they asked "are you in the union?" Of course, I had to tell them I wasn't in the union. But that was where it stood. A few weeks later I was able to get a job, as I mentioned, through our contact and have been working in the union for a couple of months.

The second story that I would like to tell is after I got this union job I got a letter from them to the district council saying they would like to hire me, so I went down to the office and said I would like to join the union. They gave me a test to see if I was qualified to join the union. This was a one-question test, and if I answered it correctly I would qualify; if not I would have to come back another time. The question was, "do you have any money?" Since I answered that question correctly I was able to get into the union.

I'd like to make just a few observations about our experiences so far with the painters union in New York. It is based on a narrow perspective, a few conversations that we have had with contacts of the party who have been in the union for some time. There are a number of ex-party members in New York in the painters union.

The painters in New York, as elsewhere, face a serious problem. There is the objective problem of the decline in construction overall which has been reported extensively and causes large unemployment in construction unions, and this of course is reflected in the painters. In addition, the painters in New York are tremendously unorganized. Only 10% of the trade is organized as actual members of the painters union. The rest is non-union, which includes some very large-scale work in New York. This has been a gradual process over the years. At one point the painters were the strongest of the building trades unions in New York, and now it is the weakest

and lowest paid of all the building trades.

This problem is compounded by the top-heavy bureaucracy which exists in the union. There are 15 to 20 locals in the district council which covers the metropolitan area. The smallest of these locals is 85 and the largest is about 750. Each of these locals, including the one with 85 members, has a full time business agent, most of whom are paid by the district council. The union officials are completely uninterested in organizing the trade in any way, which is pretty much the only way the problems of the union are going to be solved.

Their approach to organizing is illustrated by the city election. Mayor Beame was just elected mayor as a Democrat. During the election campaign he made a promise to the secretary-treasurer of the district council that if he was elected he would make sure that all Board of Education work in New York would be union. It used to be union and is now pretty much non-union. On the basis of that promise the painters donated \$10,000 to Beame's campaign and, of course, Board of Education work is still non-union in New York. This is one of the few attempts at organizing that the painters have made.

The business agents of the local unions are pretty much interested only in getting themselves reelected and they compete with each other to get jobs for their members. There is no hiring hall. The way most members get jobs is through their business agents, and each of the business agents is competing with the others to get jobs from the employers to service their members so they can be reelected as business agents.

What organization may be attempted is generally, as in the case of the contribution to Beame's election, an attempt to organize the bosses rather than the workers. I think that is also illustrated by their lack of interest in non-union painters who come to the hall and ask to join.

There was recently an organizing campaign which was carried out with funds from the International union. No one knows what happened to this. There were no reports at the membership meetings. The only thing that happened was at one point when they failed to make reports to the International union about the progress of the organizing campaign, funds were cut off and they terminated the organizing drive with a report at the council meeting to the effect that the organizers are dismissed with the thanks of the district council for doing a wonderful job. But there was no report on what the wonderful job was that they had done.

I'd like to just give an idea of what happened with our contract which came up at the beginning of August. The settlement was hailed by the district council as being a tremendous victory for the painters in New York. What we gained in this contract was a 65¢ raise the first year which was exactly what should have been gained a year ago from the cost-of-living clause in the contract which was ruled out by the CISC.

In return for this, plus a 50¢ raise for each of the next two years plus a completely inadequate cost-of-living clause which doesn't do anything until the cost of living rises by 5%—in exchange for this the union leadership gave away the extension of the roller, the stick, on new construction. It previously had been legal on repaint work. Plus, they gave away double-time for

overtime on new construction. It is now time-and-a-half. And this is a "great victory" for the union.

There was no attempt to organize or inform the membership beforehand on the course of negotiations with the bosses on the contract. There had been a city-wide membership meeting promised, which never came off. And what discussion there was took place separately in the different locals of the district council that were covered by the contract.

There are some signs of hope. I don't want to paint a completely gloomy picture. Comrades should keep in mind, of course, that this is a somewhat limited experience and we have not had discussions yet to draw all the political conclusions about the situation. So what I am giving you are observations which I have made and informal discussion we have had.

Despite the lack of preparation and information on the contract and the discussion which took place separately in each local, one local did reject the contract and had quite a militant discussion. One member proposed on the floor of the local that if we are getting a raise of 50¢ a year, why don't we give them a foot of stick a year; that would be a fair exchange.

There was also a great deal of sentiment against the contract in other locals, but the feeling was generally that the union wasn't in any shape for a strike. It hadn't been prepared by the leadership. The attendance at union meetings is extremely low; there is no attempt to mobilize the workers. And it would be difficult in that situation to pull off a successful strike. So the feeling was that there was not much else that could be done except approve the contract.

One sign of the dissatisfaction with the contract was that the district council leadership was trying to raise the dues check-off on wages from 1%, which it is now, to 2%, and there was a separate vote taken on that. That was rejected quite substantially by the membership.

In addition, just from discussions I've had on jobs I've been on, there is a tremendous cynicism about the leadership for obvious reasons. But there is no sentiment as far as we can see towards any action.

I'll close there. I don't want to draw any conclusions about this; I don't think we are in a position to do so. Except that obviously there are opportunities for us, given the objective situation the painters face and the fact that we have answers and nobody else does. Also, there are many young, Black, and other minority workers in the painters, especially among the non-union contractors. Painting is one of the few building trades which does have a large percentage of minority workers, because there is a large amount of production work which is very brutal and difficult, and the Black and Puerto Rican workers tend to get into that kind of work. In a short period of time we will have a fraction in the painters in New York. We may be in a position to have some influence.

FRANK LOVELL:

We have a kind of a treat in store for us, a report by a comrade here from England who is in the building trades. When you hear his report, even though you have the impression that the outlook is gloomy so far as the building trades in this country are concerned,

you will surely agree that we are not unique in that respect. The organization of the construction industry in England is not in any better shape than here. That doesn't help us here any, of course.

We do have answers. Our answers are contained in the pamphlet *Construction Workers Under Attack*. It's a general outline. We'll make those answers more specific as we find ways to participate in the struggles of the building trades workers. These workers are coming under such pressures now that they will have to find some way to try and maintain themselves.

There is presently more unemployment in the construction industry than in any other industry, including auto where 200,000 workers were recently laid off. The construction industry is declining. There is not money available for construction.

That means that these unions will be faced with the problems of unemployment. How will they cope with that? Are there discussions on the job about this? How will these unemployed workers be brought together so that they can protest their conditions or demonstrate for jobs? If they are demonstrating for jobs, how can the unions create jobs? Or is it possible for the unions to create jobs? That usually belongs in the bosses' department. These are usually the questions that come up almost every day on the job. If you talk to any construction worker, he knows that every time he drives a nail or paints out a wall he is working himself out of a job. He doesn't know where the next job will start. So unemployment will become increasingly a subject of conversation.

Do we have any solutions to the problem of unemployment? In the pamphlet we said, yes we do have an answer. But we didn't elaborate on it very much there. We'll have occasion to do that.

One of the ways that we engage these workers in discussion and begin to probe their problems and submit our answers and find out what solutions they have is through the circulation of our building trades pamphlet. Another way is the sale of *The Militant*.

I don't think it redounds only on our comrades who are working in the industry to sell the pamphlet. When comrades here go back to their branches they can suggest to the organizer or literature committee, "since we have quite a few of this *Construction Workers Under Attack* pamphlets, why can't we go around to job sites and sell them?" You know, those construction workers in New York and in most cities sit right out on the sidewalk at noon. There are hundreds of them sitting there having lunch. All you have to do is go up and say, "here's something that you might find interesting and it only costs two bits," (or whatever the price is). Some of them will buy it. And if we have our local address stamped on it, or if we are running forums and we happen to have a forum on the carpenters strike, or if we have a forum on the settlement in the painters union, some of them might come. I'm not promising they'll run down in great numbers, but some might come.

And we don't have to confine our activities to those who are organized. As I said earlier, the majority of these building trades workers are unorganized and some of them are seeking some forms of organization.

In New York, at the Brooklyn branch there was a

forum recently where a Black buildings trade worker who was a member of a union spoke. He hasn't been able to find very many jobs through that union and is primarily interested now in getting more Blacks into the building trades. And in order to accomplish that end he has organized, first in conjunction with "Fight Back," an organization to get Blacks into the industry. In Brooklyn he has an organization to picket job sites and to demand the hiring of Blacks, as is mandatory in the City of New York for all contractors who are getting government funds (and they all are). None of them abide by the rules and regulations of the city and federal government in this respect. They all say they do, but if you go onto any job sites there are few, if any, Blacks employed.

These are opportunities for us, and we've sought to take certain advantage of them. I mentioned the forum where one of the leaders in the effort to get Blacks into the construction industry spoke. Our comrades have participated in demonstrations that have been called at job sites, some of which have been very successful in closing them. This is something that has been going on for the past several years, and we have participated in those demonstrations in different parts of the country.

Some comrades in the past may have become discouraged with such activity because building trades workers didn't come immediately to the Socialist Workers Party, but we believe that there now is a different mood among these building trades workers. Their consciousness is not at the same level as workers in some other sectors of industry. I mentioned earlier that I don't think their level of political class consciousness at the present time is the same as the political class consciousness of workers in public service. Public employees, city workers—that strata within the working class—are more receptive to our ideas than is the case with building trades workers.

But now and then we find a young building trades worker who is interested in our politics. And that's a very valuable acquisition to us, if we can get building trades workers interested in our party. They have got the power and know-how to do things. They are valuable assets for us.

In the question period we should try to learn from different parts of the country about what success we have had in distributing our paper, selling our pamphlets, attracting construction workers to the party. We must view this as one of our main tasks in this industry. One of the ways we do it, of course, is through our activity in the unions, but there are other supplementary things that we can do.

So I'll open the floor for questions and discussion.

CHICAGO:

I wanted to mention two or three things. Unfortunately our comrades in the buildings trades couldn't make this meeting. But there are three things that happened in Chicago in the past period in the construction industry. First, the Urban League, which had the contract to do the "Chicago Plan" to get Blacks and other minorities into the construction industry, has announced that as we all guessed, the third Chicago Plan is a total failure. This was in the *Daily Defender* last Friday.

The persons in the fair employment practices commission also complained that they had no staff to go out and check the sites where workers are, and they said they would get reports that so many minority workers were working and that spot checks on those reports found them totally false. That's the first thing.

Second, this summer they were doing resurfacing of the Dan Ryan, a big highway through Chicago. As usual, they didn't have enough Blacks and other minorities working. So some of the same group that did actions before, Coalition for United Community Action (or something like that) and Latin American Task Force did a series of on-the-highway picketing demanding jobs for Blacks and Puerto Ricans and other Latins. And they stopped construction and got the jobs.

And finally, the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists, whose main base is Chicago, have as part of their major program the fight to get into the construction industry. One of the things they are doing right now is research for a possible suit to deal with the whole vocational high school situation in Chicago, the apprenticeship programs, and so on. They have found, of course, that Blacks and other minorities just aren't being hired. They aren't being trained. True, there is Washburn Vocational and other vocational schools. I've been in touch with the one in charge of this research project. When the facts are available I'll send them on.

Those are some of the things that have been happening. There could be some very important breakthroughs if that suit goes through and they happen to win.

NEW YORK:

I'm not working in the trade right now but expect to be soon.

One of the developments we've seen in New York—we haven't been directly involved in, but have seen it on the news—is the attempt of the oppressed minorities to break into the trade unions and to break into the construction trades. I think these developments in the future could be very significant for us in terms of the work we can do.

I want to give a couple of examples and expand on one of the examples Frank gave before, the person who spoke at the Brooklyn forum. Their organization is composed mainly of young, Black construction workers. They go very early in the morning, and they shut down these jobs; they go very early before the white workers can get on the job and to their tools or whatever might be used as a weapon. They are very militant and shut these jobs down. They involve large numbers of the community. It takes thirty or forty very determined people to shut down a job like that.

The other one, which I saw on the news in New York City and didn't really have time to pursue, was a job site being built in the Chinese community, in lower Manhattan. They had a picket to shut it down. But it wasn't what you would ordinarily expect. They had practically the whole community out there and a picket line of 500 people. They had a three-or-four day battle with the police to shut down that job site. I think that in the end they weren't successful. But at noon time all of the people who worked in any kind of factory or sweatshop or whatever—the whole Chinese community—marshalled and organized the action.

Although our experience with these kinds of movements to open up the trade unions to minority workers is at this point not great, we should be aware of these openings and intervene where possible, or at least begin to be aware enough of these things to feel them out and try to get some kind of information on who is involved, what other tendencies—the Social Democrats, Stalinists, whoever—are involved. What is the make-up of these demonstrations that are trying to open up the trades?

There is another example in New York, an organization that has placed about 1,000 Blacks in the different trades. It's an organization of the Social Democrats that has been going on for years. They do it simply by preparing people for the apprenticeship tests.

There may be possibilities through these organizations for making contact with militant young Black workers who are either in the trades or preparing and trying to get in the trades.

At one time, I worked at the University of Maryland. It was during the bombing of the dikes in Hanoi. We were building a high-rise there. I was trapped on this job while 4,000-5,000 students marched by and took the streets, and I had to sit up and watch while all this was going on. But even then, two years ago, there was a strict division of construction workers between those who felt that the only way you get something is by sticking together and protesting and those who wanted to take the No. 10 rods and go bust heads. The division was about 50-50.

BROOKLYN:

I am one of the apprenticed painters. On this group, Black Economic Survival, the party first found out about them well over a year ago when they started their first job action in Brooklyn. Moses Harris, who heads the thing up, was a member of Harlem Fight Back, a similar organization. It was organized to get Black construction workers on the job, many of whom were ex-cons and therefore couldn't go through the regular union channels for a job but had to go directly to a contractor to get hired. Many of these guys are extremely skilled carpenters, painters, masons, electricians. They've learned the skills in prison and now can't get a chance to use them. When they go to a job site they are considered an apprentice with only a year or two of experience and don't get journeymen's wages.

Moses felt that Harlem Fight Back was an ineffectual organization in that they were not willing to put bodies on the line and wanted to negotiate with the contractor rather than close a job site down first and then negotiate with him. So he left them and gathered around two or three others, and just talking to Black construction workers that they knew in Brooklyn, they decided to close down a couple of job sites and were successful in that, and this began to arouse interest. Things slacked off for a while because it was winter and few sites were open, but during the spring and summer they were active again. They closed down twenty or thirty job sites in Brooklyn, some city and some federal sites, some just local buildings being restored or built new.

The effect of this is that now Asian workers and Puerto Rican workers through New York City are beginning to do the same thing. The project mentioned by the previous speaker is called Confucious Plaza. It's being built

in the heart of Chinatown. They razed a couple of tenements where families lived and now are building a high-rise apartment and office building. They had no Asian workers on the job site at all. And the Asian workers looked around, saw what Black Economic Survival had done, and decided that they would do the same thing.

They were unsuccessful the first few weeks in closing the job site because they didn't get there in the morning. They did try at lunch time and in the evening. They also tried talking to the workers as they were coming out or as they were on the job itself. And they did win a certain amount of support from the white workers who felt, "Sure, this is the Chinese community and these are construction workers; we should let them on the job site.

They now do have a small handful of Chinese workers on the site.

The problem that Moses sees with this, though, is that once a job is over at one site the Black worker is going to be laid off again and have to go through the same process. Moses pointed out that we have a couple of guys who were put on with the same contractor at different sites three and four times.

But this is something I think we are going to see more of across the country. New York is just the beginning.

There are two other things I'd like to bring up. One is the Atlanta strike support. I was in Atlanta a few years ago when the first strike wave began there; comrades may remember the Mead strike. Up until that point, that was the largest strike that had taken place in Atlanta. It was basically done by workers who were printers at the Mead factory, who were organized in a printers local that was predominantly white, and they had no real control over the local. They went on strike once, and the union said it was a wildcat strike that they weren't supporting. But the party came out and mobilized; every comrade came out and walked the picket line. We had a couple of comrades who were getting up at four and five in the morning, just like striking workers, and getting down to the picket line. That kind of set the tone for the Atlanta branch. Whenever there was a strike we were able to intervene actively in that strike, and the more we intervened the better known we became. And the strikers began to see us as the best builders and supporters of their strikes.

There was just a handful of comrades to begin with, four of us basically, who began to look around for some activity in the Black community that we could get involved in as Black work. The strike wave hit, and we began to mobilize the branch.

In the Rich's workers strike we had a young comrade who had just come in from Tuscaloosa, Alabama, who had just come in and got a job there in the stock room where workers were predominantly Black. They went on strike a little before lunch. Joe came out and saw the picket line and came over to the hall and said to the organizer, "What do I do?" The organizer said to find out about the strike. As it turned out, Joe was elected to the strike steering committee and then put on the negotiating committee and was "hard man" for the strike.

The entire branch mobilized for this effort and has continued to do so for the other strikes that came along after that one.

I think this is something we should keep in mind. Any time there is a strike going on, whether it is a shop of

five or of 5,000, we should be there. We should try to find what it's about. And we should give as much concrete help as possible, whether it is walking the picket lines, articles in *The Militant*— anything we can do to support it. I think comrades can see the results. We haven't recruited any of the construction workers in either New York or Atlanta yet, but we do have a great deal of respect in the Black community and particularly among Black workers in Atlanta who see us as an ally in their struggle.

One other thing that comrades should keep in mind. I've been trying to get into a union since I was 18, that's ten years. I've tried everything. I've had answers like the Painters union gives out, and I've been told the program isn't open this year, and maybe next year, and so on. When I got out of the service I applied for almost every single union that existed in D.C. and got no responses at all. They kept saying there were no jobs, that the program isn't open, that I should come back next week. It's a real drag. But we are going to need comrades in the union and perseverance is the only thing I can tell you will get you in.

Maybe other branches have sympathizers who are carpenters, masons, and whatever and can get a comrade on a job site. If that is possible we should get comrades on the sites. We should keep our eyes open.

FRANK LOVELL:

I want to supplement some of the remarks just made. This may be useful for comrades in other branches outside of New York. In New York comrades did participate in the demonstration in Confucious Plaza. We did have an article in *The Militant*, and if I am not mistaken, one of our candidates was there and spoke. I think that's pretty good participation, given the fact that we had nobody in the trade there. Although we do know Moses and try to work closely with him, as far as the party is concerned that was the best help we could give under the circumstances. It may be that if we get to know him better we will be able to develop a closer working relationship with him. That's possible.

These possibilities ought to be pursued in every branch wherever there is something of this kind developing.

It has been mentioned that there are apprenticeship programs. I am sure that our Black comrades have tried out some of these apprenticeship programs and can tell you that there's not too much there. We would hope that Blacks can get in the apprenticeship programs, and some do, but those who do are very few, and those that complete the programs are fewer still. I see that in the electrical workers union they have pictures once in a while of a Black worker who completed the apprenticeship program. But that's the most prominent picture in the paper and it doesn't occur very often in the weekly *Union News*. That paper doesn't have much news and not much to do with unions either.

These apprenticeship programs are sponsored by government funds. The Department of Labor spends a great deal of money on the apprenticeship programs. Most of that goes to the recruitment, the "training and recruitment" program that has nice offices like this, fewer chairs. And if you go there they take your application. If you say when does the program begin, they answer "right away, we'll put you on a job and will call you," which

they never do.

But when you fill out that application you become one of their "trainees" whom they never train. But they collect money for the "trainees."

They have a program in this country called "JOBS" which has existed for the last five years, that I know of. The government spent hundreds of thousands of dollars on JOBS in one industry that I'm acquainted with, the auto industry, money that went to General Motors, that needs it badly, the Ford Motor company and the Chrysler Corporation also, to subsidize those corporations to employ what they called "inner-city workers," unemployables, men who had never been able to get a job. They were hired at regular union wage. They were paid a Chrysler check, but Chrysler in return was subsidized for training these workers.

They ran a survey a few years ago that appeared in the Detroit papers at that time, five years ago. One worker stuck to the job; they asked how he liked it and he said, "fine, it's the best job I've ever had, the only job." Do you think you'll stay? "As long as I can," he said. What do you find most encouraging about the job, they asked. "The money." And what do you find most discouraging about the job? "Well," he said, "it's not the work, but they keep asking me questions all the time. I get asked questions like this all the time." He was the object of surveys. And that is about what those programs amount to.

They don't really put many Black workers on the job, and certainly not in construction. They do not train very many Black workers to hold a job, even when Black workers are put on the job under the quota system that they've set up which they don't comply with. They are only there for the time being, for the duration of that job, not to learn anything. Everything is arranged so that they don't learn anything; very often they are not even given any work to do. That is about the most discouraging thing that can happen, in case you have never been put in that spot where they just put you on the job and leave you alone. So it is a very good way to discourage any Black worker from taking one of those jobs.

One of the things that I've been encouraging some of our comrades to do in this respect is to go through this experience. It's not very pleasant, but if we could have first-hand accounts—I don't know whether there are any such written up—for our purposes in *The Militant* about what these government programs amount to and what frauds they are, it would be useful for our propaganda purposes among Black workers, especially those Black workers who are in the construction industry in non-union jobs.

Comrades from San Francisco brought an advertisement showing what advantages the open-shop contractors are taking of these training programs. There is a big open-shop outfit in this country that is getting government funds to train apprentices, and they boast about it in their magazine. "How I get my labor free," a big testimonial by a contractor, because he has young workers that he is training at government expense. And the subsidy that is paid to him for training these workers is equivalent to what he pays them. He doesn't have to pay them union wages because these are open-shop conditions. These are the things that are going on in this industry today that workers are talking about, that

they ought to be made more familiar with, and that they surely will change in the coming period.

If there are no more questions, we now have a report from London.

LONDON:

It is very interesting listening to the problems you face in the United States. The way I see it, some of the struggles that are taking place in Britain in the construction industry are provoked by problems that you are going to face here in the United States, although the very nature of the building industry in America and there is different.

Building is open shop in Britain. Because of the very casual nature of the building trade in Britain—and because it is a total open shop—we don't have the hiring halls. In fact, there hasn't developed a conscious racist policy by the unions, and their very weakness may be one of the reasons.

In the construction industry, 85 percent is Irish. Working in London I heard someone say, well in the building industry there's Irish, there's Polish, West Indian, Scottish, Asian, Welsh, and one or two Englishmen. That's about the situation in England; there's hardly any Englishmen working in the building industry.

To try to explain the nature of this industry in London, I'd like to briefly describe three different developments, and maybe you in America can draw some conclusions.

One is the national strike that took place in 1972 in the building industry. The second is the rank-and-file organization that exists. It's dominated by the Stalinists, but I think we can learn a few lessons from it. And the third is a thing called the Lump. I don't know if you have heard of the Lump. Every worker in Britain knows about the Lump. Let me try to explain.

The Lump

In Britain, unlike America, the tax system is paid by check off. You get it stopped each week; I believe you pay annually here. The Lump is self-employment. What it means is that you don't actually register with your name and you don't pay tax. You bid on work for a lump sum, get paid in cash, and that way you avoid the tax payment. This is very attractive to immigrant workers, especially if they haven't got permits, and particularly the 85 percent of building workers who are Irish and come over from Ireland. There's been a lot of by-products of the Lump.

To give you even just one side-example. There was an accident on a building site on a bridge. The bridge collapsed. One worker got a steel bar straight through his head and was killed. They didn't even know his name. The employer who did employ him denied it since he was employed illegally. The boss said "He wasn't working for me." You know the conclusions you draw: he was only working there for love, not for money. That is one situation.

Let me tell what other chaos the Lump has created. In central London in the building industry there are about 20 major sites, and I reckon that I can count on my hand the number of apprentices in the building industry. With the housing shortage, that is one of the points that we are raising. Because of the Lump, a guy or guys get together and make the lowest bid possible to take on a job for carpentry or whatever. And you

get the job contracted out maybe six times. Someone will get the job and then the contractor will give it to someone else, and then contract it out to someone else. He may not know who has got the job, and even the main employer may not know who has the job.

You get some massive, million pound contracts where the only two men directly employed are the agent and the general foreman. Everyone else is working for Lump operators. So you might get the name of the company, but there may be 500 men working on that site and only two men employed by the main contractor. On one construction site you may have eleven nationalities and 25 different companies. They are all bonafide.

I'll give you an idea of the problem. Once you do organize, the employers have this advantage that they will play one company against the other; they may give workers of one company a concession and not the others. Thus they divide the workers.

The 1972 Strike

The other question was the national strike that developed in '72. It was quite a significant strike in the British trade union movement, the way it developed. I've got to explain it in conjunction with the rank-and-file committees that have developed, and I think this may be where comrades should take note. It's like you've got, say, in northern California just now a lot of militant building workers who haven't yet reached a revolutionary or socialist consciousness, but are frustrated with the bureaucracy of the unions. So you are having isolated pockets of building workers coming out on strike in the late '60s and mid-'60s, and from this developed the rank-and-file committees, still fighting within the unions.

Fighting within the unions was still the principle objective for them, but they would actually meet fortnightly to discuss local problems on the different sites, swap experiences, and see how best to fight. But, of course, the Stalinists have made it their big stronghold and the Stalinists in Britain, particularly in the building industry, are extremely strong.

Because of the character of the industry and its casual nature, there isn't any tradition within the trade union movement in this industry. In another industry with a stronger tradition, like engineering, the Social Democrats have got a stronger hold. But because of the casual nature of the building industry, once you organize a building worker in a lot of ways he becomes very ultraleft, actually.

We used to have at least one half-day strike every month or every fortnight just to show the employers we were still serious. We had only the one principle, come out and strike; we'd think up a reason, but we'd come out and strike, just to show the employers that we were serious.

What the Stalinists have done in the rank-and-file committees is called the Charter. We've even got a magazine with a circulation of 15,000, and that's twice the circulation of any revolutionary paper in Britain. But the workers' attitude towards it is not favor for general causes. The Stalinists try to use it to kind of get a respectable niche within the trade union movement so they can become bureaucrats. In other words, their position is that they want respectability so that they can join the bureaucracy, so they work hand and hand with them.

Obviously, we try to project that we are interested in the majority of the building workers. On one or two occasions we caucus and work with the I.S., and in the job sites we have been able to actually show the Stalinists up.

We often get into a situation with building workers, where the average wage is about \$200-250 per week; yet the same opposite is getting about \$80 per week, a hundred yards away. With the open shop in the building industry, you have to organize on the sites. You go into a site for a month or two and talk to the guys. And when you think you have talked to a majority of them, you end up their official union organizer and you say "okay, let's have a meeting." Then you say why you want the union, because of conditions, etc., and ask "who is going to join the union?—hands up!" And you find you do not have the problem of actually getting into the union.

In Britain they give out union cards like green stamps, because an organizer gets his job by how many members he gets, and if that membership drops he gets the sack. So he is very interested actually in getting as many people in the union as possible.

But to go back to this national strike in '72. Because of consistent pressure upon the main unions in the building industry, there was a demand raised for 35 pounds for 35 hours. That was a demand for an increase in wages of 15 pounds a week, that would be \$33 increase per week and a 5 hour reduction in wages.

The official trade union movement took up a 30 pound for 35 hours, and what happened—I think John, the other comrade from Britain will tell you—we had flying pickets (I think you call them "cruising pickets" in the States). We would go around to the different building sites, explain the issues, and then get the guys to come out on strike.

You talked about openings for militants in the building industry, made by the bureaucrats over here! Even more the bureaucrats in Britain! Because there was such a response to the dispute in Britain, I and a lot of other militants were actually made up to official status within the union, where we got a ticket saying we were, for the duration of the strike, a trade union official. And we could walk along to a building site and see the agent on the job and tell him we wanted to discuss with the men in the canteen to get them out on strike. "Oh you can't come in here," he said. "Okay, have it your own way," I said, "either I'll get the men out on the pavement now to discuss it with them, or if you like now I'll discuss it with the men in the canteen and I'll let you close the job down at 4:30 so you can make it weather strong and tie up everything to leave the job secure."

John talked to the men, explained the issues—even men who were on the Lump—and we organized, he and I signed up 150 men in the union, there and then, just like that. That was the type of response we got during the building strike.

What developed also in Britain then was the question of mass pickets. By the very nature of the building industry, there is always at least one site on strike every week, just like it is developing in the States now. You used to call a demonstration on your own site for solidarity. The question used to be not whether we should show out, but the question used to be shall we go into

the site before they get there and occupy it to stop the scabs going over the picket line, or shall we go there at 7:30 to stand so they won't get through the picket line. I'd say that is how the mass picket developed during the strike.

The ruling class in Britain knew how effective this was becoming, and that's why they introduced the laws around Shrewsbury. I don't want to go into that just now because that is another question.

But just on these points I've made, I think it is important—I don't know, maybe you can tell me whether there is any potential or possibility for the development of rank-and-file committees within the militants, particularly in northern California or more generally where strikes are taking place? Is there something that we, the comrades in the SWP, should be projecting just now to get more cohesion actually? It's very difficult as just the Socialist Workers Party, but we can involve others, even bureaucrats, if you like as a step, and we may be more successful in winning more people to the party.

FRANK LOVELL:

Jim asked us several questions, but we do have time if comrades want to ask him questions.

California comrades know the answer, or at least part of the answer, because there were some embryonic formations developing among the rank and file in the California strikes earlier, not in the most recent strikes, but last winter. Incidentally, they were organized in part by Irish workers who came over.

SAN FRANCISCO:

The rank-and-file strike in the northern California carpenters was organized by a rank-and-file strike committee, numbering some 100-150 militants who were there at one time or another. Meetings were held regularly and a flying squad of picketing was organized out of that.

The weakness of the rank-and-file strike committee was that it was not independent of the bureaucracy of the union. One of the reasons for that is the weight of the bureaucracy in the construction unions in the United States, certainly in the carpenters union, and the extent of the control of the official union apparatus.

The situation in Great Britain seems to be such a contrast that I have a hard time beginning to understand what it must be like operating there.

I think we have not seen the last rank-and-file strike committee. These construction unions are under heavy attack and it is inevitable, an absolute certainty, that in different areas around the country where we have comrades, as happened in northern California, there will be openings and there will be rank-and-file strike committees developing.

I think we want to have the attitude of being right there and jumping right into it. I don't think we want to take the attitude that, "well these construction workers are basically racist and conservative anyhow," which is still generally true. But that is on the surface, and we will be able to meet the militants.

So, we met them, and we met opponent tendencies in the union, members of Progressive Labor Party. At the time we had only one comrade active in the rank-and-file strike committee, and they had three or four or five.

And we met a few politicians who may even be underground CP that never came out. Progressive Labor had some strength. We saw that they, as well as some of the other political elements in the leadership of this rank-and-file strike committee made some attempts to continue it and did not succeed. There was no basis of agreement, not even elementary agreement on what could be done after the strike. The rank-and-file strike committee was organized around winning 65¢ that was coming to the carpenters that was cut by the pay board. So the thing disintegrated.

The opponents, PLP, have tried to keep alive a caucus in that union situation based on publishing little newsletters about the union and opposing the bureaucracy. We have seen, they put out newsletters and leaflets, what the caucus has done. We have taken a fairly aggressive attitude towards it; we attend most of its meetings, come and sell *The Militant* and pamphlet, and don't miss the opportunity to talk to whatever healthy elements are drawn around it. It is inevitable that a few are.

But this PLP and any other tendencies that we'll meet in the building trades, and certainly the Communist Party, have no perspective for building a class struggle left-wing tendency in the union and don't really have the beginning of a program for it. They don't have anything to compare with what we have in the pamphlet or coverage in *The Militant*. The coverage in the CP paper on the West Coast, which has certainly a lot more resources to cover the construction strike, is not as good. Just in terms of fact and interpretation, it was all on the side of the bureaucrats in the construction strike and didn't have much of an appeal when it comes to explaining things. So we have a much better tool to work with at this point.

Of course, the PLP, which is the main force as an opponent, is trying to build some kind of rank-and-file activity but has not been successful in drawing together anything that is real, because most of the militants stand off from that. We are going to their meetings, not being a part of the caucus or identified with it, but we are not missing any opportunities to talk with people. The correctness of our line in a situation is shown in the leaflet that I alluded to that we put out on the last contract. The caucus also put out a statement on the contract, explaining that it wasn't a good contract because it didn't have anything about improvement of working conditions, and the wage increase was not adequate, and so on. We were able to say more about the character of the leadership of the union and the way the strike was conducted, in addition to the contract, in the leaflet we put out. Ours had the authority of a layer of militants in several different unions. We weren't identified with a narrow caucus in a single union.

So that's what I can say in terms of the rank-and-file strike committee. We are going to see it again, but this

one in northern California has not really continued.

I just want to make another point, related to our experience with these militants. We had interesting people in the union, all kinds of interesting people. In the carpenters union, more so than any of the other unions, we find ex-students, people who have actually been involved in radical politics at one time or another. We met these types. We met one guy in the union who surfaced for a time; we sold *The Militant* and a pamphlet to him. He started out demonstrating against the House Un-American Activities Committee and then went through every social movement of the '60s—civil rights, free speech, Vietnam war—he went through everything.

We met a young woman who now reads *The Militant*. My organizer tells me we have just gotten a young woman into the painters, with a job now. Another woman in the carpenters is friendly and visits us from time to time. That's been a part of our work; we keep social contact with these people.

A comrade has a working partner who is in and around I.S.; he knows our party and is very friendly. We are selling the pamphlet. Frank made the comment that we shouldn't have any narrow perspective on our propaganda work or think that it is limited to the comrades in this room who are in the industry. We had this meeting of 10,000 carpenters at the Cow Palace auditorium, and we had 15 comrades from the branch there selling *The Militant* and pamphlet. We scared PLP and every other tendency that was there when they saw our intervention.

One of the people we met there was a guy who had gone to college with the organizer of our branch and graduated from the University of California with a B.A. and has been working as a carpenter ever since. We run across all sorts of people. We run into ex-PLers who are friendly. The more we get into the situation and meet these people and talk to them on the job, the more we find that these young people have actually participated in the antiwar movement and are not strangers to radical politics. They know about us and are sometimes open to our ideas. So you can get excited about it, as we have.

We've had the opportunity, and want to do more work and meet more of these people. We are going to recruit them eventually. We may not recruit anyone immediately, but we are in contact with people we think we can recruit. We know that conditions are going to get worse and we are the only ones with answers, so we are going to keep in contact and work with them in any way we can—strike support activity, inviting them to our functions, making sure they read *The Militant*.

FRANK LOVELL:

If there are no more questions or comments, we'll adjourn.

REPORT TO THE BRANCH FINANCES WORKSHOP

by Mary Scully, Lower Manhattan Branch

When the Lower Manhattan branch launched its campaign to figure out exactly what was going on financially in the branch departments and to develop their financial functioning, it was first of all to turn our branch budget from a monthly exercise into a working tool that really was determined by and reflected our political tasks and performance.

Secondly, it was based on a hunch that neglect of branch department finances meant waste. The "hunch" originated in a substantial deficit in our bulletin account. We speculated that if there could be a substantial loss in a transaction as *apparently* simple as passing bulletins across a table and receiving money in return, then in more complicated financial operations like forums and sales there must be more waste. But we didn't know.

I should point out that this was within the framework of general financial health and strength. Lower Manhattan is a very large branch with a very large budget. We had for some time been paying a \$15 per capita sustainer to the N. O. and had no debts whatsoever. But because inflation was beginning to have an impact on our finances at the same time as the opportunities for the party were expanding, we wanted to be economical and thrifty with our money. We wanted to find out exactly where our money was going to make sure that *all* of it was being spent in accordance with our political decisions, that none of it was drifting through our fingers, and that inflation didn't hold us back from carrying out these decisions in any way.

The branch adopted this as a major financial goal and we initiated the campaign in September of last year, confident that by October rudimentary methods of planning and control would be in working order and by November everything would be running smoothly. We underestimated and misjudged the task. By November we were just beginning to see what the problems were, how to approach the whole matter.

Before I say *how* we learned to approach this campaign, let me say how we learned *not* to approach it. It is not a matter of developing forms for department heads to fill in and return periodically to the financial director; it is not convincing department heads to watch nickels and dimes; it isn't just teaching them how to draw up budgets. It is not *just* a cost accounting matter. The problems, we learned, are *not* administrative and neither are the solutions—which is why they can't be solved overnight.

We found that political problems are usually at the root of financial disorder and that financial disorder creates additional political problems. The most important political problem behind and perpetuated by financial disorder is an indifferent and lackadaisical attitude toward branch finances as a whole. To turn that attitude around is a political process, not an administrative matter.

In order to unravel and clarify what was going on financially in the branch departments we had to sit down with the department heads and some committee members to see what existed, to figure out if there were, in fact, problems that would affect finances, and to begin working out solutions. I might say that most often the department heads had no records and no financial history to refer to. They tended to think, "If we've been getting along without any so far, why do we need them now?"

Department heads are not easily convinced to attend to department finances simply for reasons of bookkeeping or cost accounting. They have a lot of political work to do and they don't want to take time just to satisfy some fetish of the financial director. They had to be convinced that there is political purpose and merit to all this budgeting, record keeping, etc., and even to our discussions. We had to show them and prove to them that it makes a difference, that planning out our needs and how to meet them and learning to economize does not short change our political tasks, but rather gives us the most political mileage out of each dollar. And that neglect and chaos in one area of work affects the branch as a whole.

In order to plan and economize we needed to begin with budgets and records. We had to find out what was going on. That meant reviewing with the department heads the considerations and concepts of drawing up a budget, what determines a department budget, and how we use it. If we know what our political goals are, we can determine what our financial goals are. It also meant developing records and knowing how to use them, what they're for—politically as well as financially—that is, to accurately assess our performance, to aid us in making future projections, and to figure out if and why problems exist.

Perhaps the most instructive and certainly the most difficult areas to financially organize were 1) headquarters maintenance and office supplies and 2) sales.

First, on headquarters and office supplies: for a branch as large as Lower Manhattan these are two very costly areas of branch functioning. Because there was no planning or controls governing in either area, our budget projections meant little. They were guesses. We had no idea what each department was using, for what, and how much.

Through instituting an inventory system and developing our sign-out systems we unearthed some expensive problems. The first was that the branch was, to a certain extent, subsidizing the YSA, the other two branches, city-wide apparatuses of other organizations, the campus fractions, and sustaining weekly raids on our supplies by the Lower East Side fraction. To this we called a halt.

The most difficult part, however, was instituting budgeting for office supplies—that is, convincing the departments and campus fractions that it is *possible* and necessary to plan out their office supply needs.

The task of financially organizing and politically developing and coordinating these two areas of work, we learned, required instituting a director.

On the sales committee: I'm rather convinced that most of the problems in this area derive from our close proximity to *The Militant* business office.

The sales committee had no useful financial records at all. They kept no records of the money they turned in to me, their figures on bundle size often corresponded not at all to *The Militant* bill, and the sales director and financial director were bringing in conflicting reports to the branch. In such a situation there can be no accurate assessment of how we met our sales goal or what goals to project for the future.

In trying to account for the differences we found that the bookstore for several months had been taking a weekly bundle from the branch bundle, keeping irregular records, and keeping the income.

We found that because comrades were not returning unsold papers and money until the end of the week the sales committee would order more in midweek rather than wage a campaign to have the papers returned. Minneapolis and Seattle can't do that, of course, since they're farther away from the business office.

And most important, we found that no one on the sales committee had participated in discussions on the bundle sizes. No one knew how it had been arrived at.

These are not just financial questions, although they have serious financial consequences. They are political questions also and they couldn't be solved only through financial means. But our investigation of what was going on financially clarified the political disorganization.

Once the sales committee began to see the problems created by financial disorder, they began taking quite admirable initiative in developing better methods. They discarded all of my forms, etc., and instituted a record system of all money turned in to me, with my initials verifying that it was correct, and what is now called a "wrap-up" sheet, which is a simple and useful financial and political report at the end of each week's sales records.

We found these kinds of problems in every other area of work.

We've also learned that this is a continuous and permanent feature of branch finances. Every time a department head changes, every addition to a committee, every branch reorganization means reviewing the importance and methods of department finances; it means constant attention and necessitates constant collaboration with the organizers, the YSA, the departments, and campus fractions.

It means that for every single activity of the branch which involves money—and nothing does not—including bulletin sales, socials, educationals, *EVERYTHING*

is carefully planned and controlled.

I pointed out earlier that an indifferent attitude towards branch finances is behind and perpetuated by financial disorder. We wanted to change that attitude along with the notion that branch finances means the financial director sitting behind closed doors, paying bills, making ends meet, and surfacing at branch meetings to receipt sustainer money.

Comrades work very hard for very little money; they give a lot to the party, and it is also their responsibility and in their interest to make sure that *all* of it goes to building the party. Branch finances is a collective responsibility.

We didn't think instituting a financial reign of terror was the way to develop this responsibility and healthy financial consciousness.

When the branch adopted this as a major financial goal, they agreed to become real and indispensable participants in the process. Our reports to the branch repeatedly pointed out the concrete ways comrades are involved: the frugal use of supplies, careful use of equipment, turning unsold papers and sales money in right away, not using the phone for personal matters, and we encouraged them to offer us their ideas. The branch reports indicated our progress, the problems, the lessons learned, and repeated the political merits of frugality and planning and what money means to the party.

We discussed and reviewed this goal with every new member as new participants, emphasizing that sustainers are only one side of their financial responsibilities.

In our reports and discussions we linked our frugality campaign with the centrality of sustainers, insisting that comrades can't allow giving with one hand and whittling away with the other.

Through this essentially educational process comrades became interested in the process and in finances. They began to pay attention to financial reports to find out what we had unearthed and what they could do about it. And just as important, they gained confidence in how their hard-earned money was being used. They saw where their money was going, where the waste was, and we took steps to weed it out.

It's been said before—and it is absolutely true—that if comrades are sure that all of their money is going to build the revolutionary party they will become more generous, which means that in that regard the party won't have to compete with inflation.

As comrades can see, attention to department finances is not just a cost accounting, bookkeeping matter. It is far more than saving money on office supplies.

Take a look at everything. The purpose is to put the branch in political and financial shape in order to resist the impact of inflation and to financially be able to take on political challenges that are ahead.

