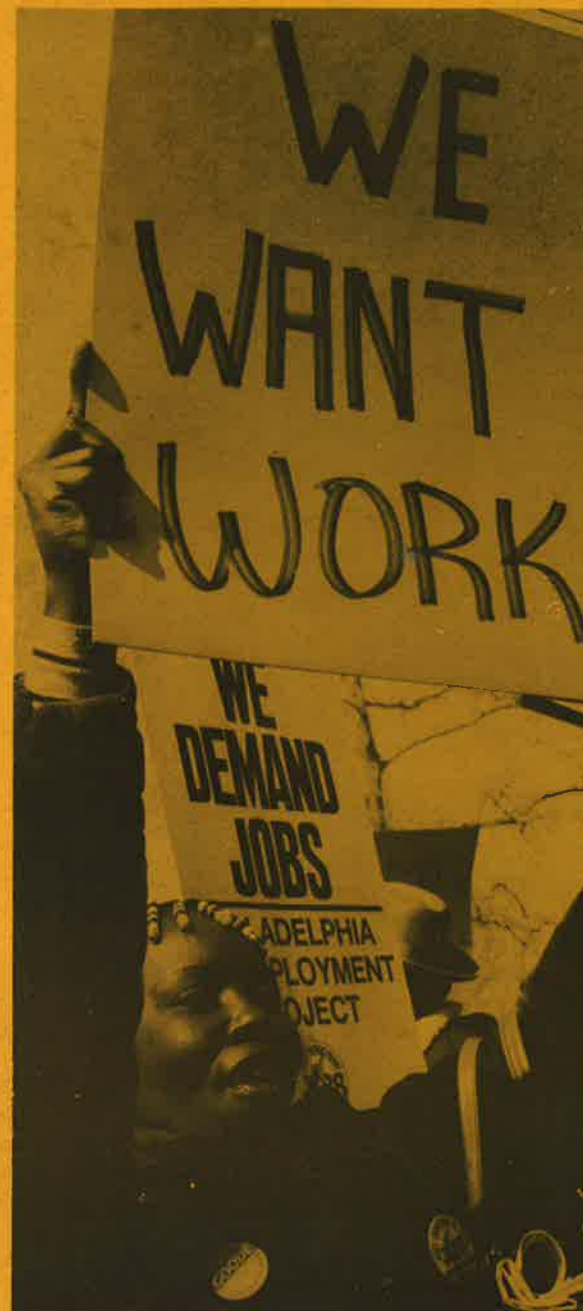


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The right to earn a living:

A program
for the
unemployed
movement

INTRODUCTION

From the Ohio Valley "Rust Bowl" to the barrios of Los Angeles, from Chicago's South Side to the lumber towns of the Pacific Northwest, a mass movement of unemployed workers is taking shape across the country. They forced a freeze on home foreclosures in Pittsburgh. They jammed California's State Capitol to demand tough plant closings legislation. They gathered by the thousands in Washington, D.C., to demand new relief measures for the jobless, launching the National Unemployed Network in the process. Wherever they have organized, they have raised demands that speak to their immediate need to provide for their families, and to a deeper conviction that all workers have a right to earn a living.

Despite the official talk of "recovery," the economic crisis that spawned this movement will not go away. The movement thus faces a challenge. It needs a program around which it can build the broadest possible unity. It needs an overview of the struggle that will enable it to gain strength as well as endure. What you're about to read is an attempt to answer those two needs.

The U.S. League of Revolutionary Struggle (M-L) is a multinational communist organization with chapters around the country. We are active in the unemployed workers movement and the movement against plant closings. In developing this program, we've drawn upon the practical experience of the movement to date, and upon our own analysis of U.S. capitalism, why it cannot provide us with a decent life or secure livelihoods, and what will be required to change it.

Many of the demands we raise are being raised wherever unemployed workers have banded together. Others will be more controversial. We think all of them must be aggressively fought for if we are to have the kind of unity we need to defend ourselves against mass unemployment and the terrible hardships it brings. We think the program as a whole reflects the interests of all workers — whether they have already lost their jobs, or have reason to fear that their jobs will be next to go.

We have not confined ourselves to a list of demands. We have placed these demands in the context of a broader political perspective, the essence of which is our belief that true job security is impossible under capitalism and we must link our day-to-day struggle with the long-term struggle for socialist revolution. We don't expect everyone who reads this pamphlet to share this perspective, but we think it should be seriously discussed as the unemployed movement struggles to get its bearings and chart its course for the battles ahead.

Finally, to give a better sense of our own role in the unemployed movement, we address several of the more urgent questions facing unemployed workers today.

The unemployed movement has its work cut out for it. We think the outlook expressed in this pamphlet will help it rise to the challenge.

THE FIGHT AGAINST UNEMPLOYMENT

A political perspective and a program for action

Last year saw more people looking for work and not finding it than at any other time in our nation's history.

This is not an accident. Over 12 million people are unemployed today because the capitalists found they could make higher profits by laying them off than by providing them with jobs.

In this society, goods are produced not to satisfy human needs, but to fulfill the need of capitalist enterprises to outsell their competition. At the same time, capitalist profits depend on getting as much production out of workers for as little wages as possible, making it harder and harder for workers to buy back what is produced.

As more and more goods go unsold, the capitalists cut back production and lay off workers to maintain their profits. The spiral continues until enough stronger firms are able to swallow up their weaker competitors, grab a bigger share of the market and begin producing profitably. Only then are workers hired back — until a new “crisis of overproduction” hits and starts the entire process going again.

Hard times are here to stay

These “crises of overproduction” are built into the system; they have been a regular feature of U.S. capitalism from its earliest days.

Over 12 million people are unemployed today because the capitalists found they could make higher profits by laying them off than by providing them with jobs.



Union meeting, Youngstown, Ohio, 1980. These steel workers wiped out 10,000 local steel jobs. Though unemployment epidemic was building long before he took office.



workers fought bitterly against plant shutdowns that ment has reached new highs under Reagan, the jobless

But far more is involved in the present crisis. And, unlike previous ones, it will not be temporary.

Before 1970, U.S. capitalists used their domination of the world economy to protect themselves from the irrationality of their system of production for profit. They used third world countries and other capitalist countries as a dumping ground for their goods. They ripped off oil and other vital raw materials from the underdeveloped world.

Since 1970, third world countries have met with growing success in their struggle to resist foreign domination and claim what is rightfully theirs. U.S. energy monopolies are no longer able to grab Mideast oil at bargain-basement prices. Foreign military adventures to protect overseas investments are much harder for the U.S. government to pull off. Meanwhile, other capitalist countries like West Germany and Japan have gained strength over the years and are challenging U.S. supremacy, staking out bigger shares of the world market for themselves.

The U.S. is still the strongest economic power in the world. But these developments have put its economy into a permanent decline. In the last 15 years, profit rates for U.S. business have fallen from 15.5% to less than 10%.

To protect themselves, capitalists are cutting

their losses and closing less profitable plants. They are doing everything they can to bust unions, keep them out altogether or undermine union contracts with concessions demands. They are shifting production overseas or to low-wage areas inside the U.S. Wherever they can raise the cash, they are introducing robots and other new technology to take the jobs of workers. They are abandoning older basic industries like auto and steel and investing their money in low-wage, high-profit concerns like hotels, fast-food chains and electronics firms. Rather than spending money to renovate outdated plants, they are squandering billions on fast-buck speculation and merger schemes.

And through their agent in Washington, Ronald Reagan, they are launching a wholesale attack on the social programs which have buttressed workers' living standards for years. The elimination of these programs leaves all workers more vulnerable to increased exploitation. "Reaganomics" means one thing only: the preservation of business profits by tightening the screws on the working class.

The results are all around us. An estimated two million homeless during the terrible winter of 1982-83. An infant mortality rate in some cities that equals that of the poorest countries in Central America, countries ravaged by years of imperialist exploitation. An average of 22 weeks elapsed since laid-off workers last worked — often long after their unemployed benefits have run out. An epidemic of evictions, foreclosures, utility shut-offs. Schools, libraries, mass transit and other needed public services closing because there is no money to keep them going. The virtual disappearance of women and oppressed nationality workers from many areas of unionized basic industry, where they had fought for years for the right to work alongside white men. A staggering 50% jobless rate among Black youth, with more than 20% unemployed in the Black community

A strong movement can do more than protest the effects of capitalist greed. It can demand more than the right to be "consulted." It can challenge the power which the capitalists hold over our lives.

overall. One family in seven living below the poverty level, the highest rate in almost 20 years.

How can workers fight back?

The present proposals of the capitalist politicians of both major parties have little or nothing to offer us. Neither do the chauvinist demands of many top union leaders for import controls and immigration restrictions. The rise of new "high-tech" industries will never re-employ more than a small fraction of those now on layoff. Worker-owned enterprises, touted by some as the solution to plant shutdowns, face impossible odds trying to survive in a capitalist market dominated by giant corporations.

Workers' true strength lies in their unity — between employed and unemployed, union and nonunion, men and women, and among different nationalities. A strong unemployed movement would involve unions granting full rights and participation to their unemployed members and aggressively organizing the unorganized. It would feature a working alliance between workers and oppressed nationality communities, based on a shared determination to immediately halt the layoff of minority workers far out of proportion to their numbers. It

would fight not just for unemployed relief, but for an active defense of the living standards of workers everywhere. It would take up the fight to organize the unorganized and fight against barriers which prevent this. It would make principled alliances with others in fighting the spread of joblessness.

We believe that our enemy is a capitalist system that justifies unemployment in the name of "good business," and a capitalist class whose profits depend on our deepening misery. A strong movement can do more than protest the effects of capitalist greed. It can demand more than the right to be "consulted" before high-level decisions are made which play havoc with our lives. It can challenge the power which the capitalists hold over us.

Our demands

Our tasks are clear. To ease the terrible burdens of soaring unemployment, the following demands must be implemented *now*:

- An immediate freeze on all evictions, utility shut-offs and home foreclosures for unemployed workers.
- Extension of all health care benefits lost due to layoff.
- Full utilization of surplus food resources to feed families of the jobless. This would be in addition to food subsidy programs such as food stamps, etc.
- Extension of unemployment benefits for the full period of unemployment, including first-time job seekers.
- A retraining program that prepares workers for jobs that really exist, which pay union wages, etc.
- Strengthened and extended affirmative action. An immediate end to the disproportionate layoffs of women and minorities. At the very minimum, the makeup of the work force in individual plants must reflect its sex and national composition at time of peak employment.



One plant among the thousands that has closed as capitalists seek higher profits elsewhere.



"Save our homes": jobless workers disrupted sheriff's sales in Pittsburgh and forced authorities to declare a temporary freeze on home foreclosures.

Underlying these demands is a belief in the right of every worker to a decent job. Yet genuine, sustained full employment is impossible under a capitalist system.

Because mass unemployment is more than just a temporary emergency, we also demand the following:

- A 30-hour week with no cut in pay, to spread the available work around.
- Passage of plant closings legislation, providing for adequate advance notice of any shut-down, full severance pay, maintenance of company-paid health benefits for laid-off workers, transfer rights with workers compensated for moving expenses, and compensation to communities for tax revenues lost as a result of shutdowns.
- The opening of corporate books for worker and community inspection, so that those most affected by company investment decisions can defend their interests fully informed of company strategy and available resources.
- An end to federal tax breaks that give business an incentive to shut down existing operations and move them overseas.
- An end to the corporate practice of strengthening control over workers by laying them off at one plant while expanding operations with a new work force somewhere else. No new plants built until the companies involved have called back all their laid-off employees.
- Full restoration and extension of all social services now being cut back. Establishment of a comprehensive program of national health insurance.
- A massive federal employment program, with priority hiring of minority workers, for needed public works and service programs, especially in minority communities hit hardest by federal spending cutbacks. Financing through major cuts in the defense budget, increased corporate and capital gains taxes and the closing of business tax loopholes.

We pledge our active support for workers in other countries, especially the third world, who

are fighting for the right to unionize, for democracy and independence. We oppose U.S. imperialist domination which has served systematically to deprive them of those rights.

What capitalism can't give us

These demands are based on our belief in the fundamental right of every worker to a decent job. We recognize that genuine, sustained full employment is impossible under a capitalist system. Our ultimate goal, therefore, is a socialist society — a society where workers collectively own the means of production and can make the economy function in their own interest.

Under socialism, a worker's livelihood does not depend on whether someone else thinks he can make a profit by hiring him. No one lives off the labor of others, and the means of producing wealth are not controlled by private corporations. There is no room for the notion that society's wealth can be increased by forcibly idling able-bodied people — an assumption that capitalists make all the time. Instead, human labor power is treated like the precious resource that it is.

In a socialist society, decisions about how much to produce, where to invest, how much to charge for goods and what kind of goods to make are geared towards building a stable, prosperous economy and insuring that everyone's basic needs are taken care of. Production plans are based on a realistic assessment of what the economy needs, and not on the need of individual businesses to outproduce and undersell their competition. The "crises of overproduction" which periodically idle thousands of workers under capitalism are unknown.

Socialism frees workers from the capitalist drive to squeeze as much work as possible out of the smallest number of workers. There is no need for some to be working overtime while others are jobless. New technology is welcomed

for easing the burdens of human labor, rather than feared for threatening our livelihoods. All society shares in its benefits — rather than having it monopolized by a few capitalists while thousands of workers are automated out of their jobs.

Socialism does not come about through an accumulation of reforms that gradually transform capitalism into something different. It requires that the working class and its allies seize power from the capitalists who now hold power over them. That is why, in the day-to-day struggle for concrete demands, we must bear in mind that we are also fighting for something larger, and build up the forces of the working class for the long-range struggle for revolution.



Sacramento, California, 1982: 500 workers jam the State Capitol hearing room to demand enactment of tough plant closings legislation. Similar scenes have occurred in statehouses across the country. (UNITY photo)

What next for the unemployed movement? Our stand on some key questions

Will the growth of the high-tech sector of the economy mean jobs for unemployed workers?

No. Overall, the high-tech "boom" will destroy more jobs than it creates. *Business Week* magazine predicts that 25 million jobs will be wiped out by new technology in the next 20 years. Another study says that workers vulnerable to job loss because of robots include 22% of the work force of Michigan, 20% of the work force of Ohio and Indiana, 18% of Illinois workers, 17% for Wisconsin and 15% for Missouri and California. Despite the rapid growth of the robotics industry, experts predict that no more than 50,000 new employees will be needed to build robots in the rest of this decade.

The high-tech sector of the economy will probably not grow as quickly in the rest of the 1980's as it has in the last few years. The vast majority of jobs that will become available in high-tech are low-paying (starting at \$4 an hour,

on the average). The relatively small number of scientific and technical positions that will be available require two to ten years of training. And as competition intensifies between high-tech capitalists, it is likely that more companies will follow the example set by Atari, closing down their U.S. production facilities and setting up shop in third world countries. U.S. domination of these countries allows U.S. corporations to pay workers as little as 25¢ an hour.

How many new jobs will be generated by the 1983 "economic recovery"?

Not very many. Last December the unemployment rate was 10.8%, its highest level since the Great Depression of the 1930's. This June, unemployment had only fallen to 10%. Millions of workers will remain jobless for years: economists predict that unemployment will re-

main as high as 9% by the end of 1984.

For thousands of unemployed workers, therefore, the recession will continue. But if we look at the capitalist class, it's a different story altogether. Capitalists have been using the threat of unemployment to force workers to accept wage and benefit concessions. This is the main reason that Chrysler's profits, for example, have soared to their highest level in history.

But making the monopolies richer won't do much for the working class. In the auto industry, higher profits are likely to mean more robots, not more jobs for laid-off UAW members. Instead of modernizing and reopening its shut-down production facilities, U.S. Steel is channeling its profits into "diversification" schemes like buying up oil companies and fast-food chains.

Will stepped-up defense spending bring more jobs?

Higher military spending will support some jobs. But where is the money coming from? Most of it is from cuts in government spending on social programs like education, welfare and public housing. This means *fewer* jobs for teachers, government employees and construction workers.

The result is that higher military spending actually means less jobs. This is because a dollar of government spending creates many more jobs in social programs than it does in the defense industry. A study by the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers (IAM) reveals that \$1 billion can produce 48,000 hospital jobs or 62,000 teachers' jobs. The same \$1 billion creates just 14,000 jobs in the defense industry.

How does the LRS look at the local content law and other efforts to restrict foreign imports?

The LRS opposes all forms of U.S. protec-

tionism against foreign imports. Protectionism does *not* mean more jobs. It is impossible to cut foreign imports without also cutting U.S. exports. If the U.S. just tried to export without also importing, foreign countries wouldn't have the U.S. dollars they need to buy U.S. goods. The domestic content law might mean rehiring some laid-off workers in U.S. automobile parts plants, but it would also mean that at least as many other workers elsewhere in the U.S. economy would inevitably be laid off. If GM imports fewer parts from Mexico, Mexico will have to import fewer goods from the U.S. One study predicts a net *loss* of 390,000 jobs by 1990 if content legislation is enacted; though this figure may be on the high side, the reasoning behind the prediction is sound enough.

The steel capitalists are also calling for protection against foreign imports. This move would undoubtedly boost their profits, but whether protection would do anything for laid-off steel workers is an entirely different question. Instead of rehiring these workers, the steel monopolies have already shown that they'd much rather use their profits to buy up other companies.

More fundamentally, protectionism divides the working class and weakens its fighting strength. The anti-import crusade seeks to enlist the U.S. working class in the battle of the U.S. capitalists against their foreign competitors. Protectionism promotes national chauvinism and pits U.S. workers against their class brothers and sisters in other countries, under-

Import controls do not help workers. They divide the working class and weaken its fighting strength.

mining the united struggle against the U.S. monopoly capitalist class.

Are worker buyouts of shut-down plants a viable option for workers fighting to save their jobs?

As a last resort, workers may prefer to try to "buy the damn place and run it ourselves," as one Youngstown steel worker put it, rather than resigning themselves to the unemployment lines. Certainly workers have the right to use every weapon at their disposal to save their jobs, and some buy-out campaigns have served a useful purpose in harassing the capitalists and educating the community about the problem of shutdowns and corporate greed.

The problem is that, once actually implemented, most buyouts are doomed to failure. If this society made it possible for significant numbers of workers to become successful capitalists, they would never have had to sell their labor power in the first place. Even successful worker-run enterprises, like the cooperative lumber mills once found throughout the Pa-

It's no accident that the jobless rate remains high, despite soaring capitalist profits. The capitalists' "recovery" strategy is based on using the threat of unemployment to increase exploitation and drive down our living standards.

cific Northwest, are eventually bought out by giant corporations. The market economy gives all the advantages to monopoly corporations who have millions of dollars at their disposal and countless means of wiping out their competition. And all too often, as the price of "survival," worker-owned enterprises must submit to the dictates of the banks and government agencies which finance them. Workers must make humiliating concessions that they would never tolerate from a private employer, concessions which actually undermine the standards for wages and working conditions of other workers as well.

The tremendous resources and energy that workers must expend keeping a worker-owned enterprise alive could be better spent uniting with others and pursuing political objectives that would benefit all workers, and not just fighting a rear-guard action in a single plant.

How has the LRS taken up the fight against unemployment?

In unions, we have fought for strong local unemployed committees and worked to build these committees up. We fight for laid-off members to remain active in the local, and struggle against any policies that serve to pit their interests against those of the employed members. We have found that these committees often serve as the best possible base from which to launch unemployed organizing.

We have actively participated in mass lobbying efforts for plant closures legislation in California, and for federal unemployed relief in Washington. We put out the view in these struggles that the politicians of both parties are not to be trusted, but that it is important to keep the pressure on them.

We participate in labor/community/church coalitions that have formed around the country to fight plant shutdowns and the spread of



General Motors workers in Van Nuys, California, didn't wait for their pink slips before organizing. Their aggressive campaign to keep their jobs involves a working alliance with the local Chicano and Black communities, both of which would be devastated by the threatened plant shutdown. Workers' tactics include a possible boycott of GM products in the Los Angeles area, one of the giant auto-maker's biggest markets. (UNITY photo)

joblessness.

Where particular shutdowns have threatened to have particularly destructive effects on oppressed nationality communities, we have fought to build an alliance between the workers in the plant and the affected communities, explicitly pointing out the racist implications of the shutdown.

Generally, we try to "unite all who can be united" in defense of jobs. The "ripple effect" of unemployment affects entire communities and undermines the interests of many class forces, not just workers. We try to hammer out a basis for unity among these different class forces.

In plants where the pattern of last hired, first fired has continued to keep oppressed nationality workers at the bottom of the seniority ladder, we have fought the disproportionate impact of layoffs on women and minorities. We continue to push for affirmative action and have fought for transfer rights for minority

workers when plants move out of the inner cities and into isolated rural locations.

We have fought for businesses investing in oppressed nationality communities to hire a work force which reflects the composition of the community.

We have vigorously opposed the Simpson-Mazzoli bill and supported unionization efforts by undocumented and immigrant workers, urging other workers to do the same in the interest of worker unity.

We have struggled inside unions for genuine job security provisions in union contracts, and challenged the view that contract concessions are some kind of automatic ticket to job security.

Wherever we have worked, we have tried to educate our fellow workers about the reasons for mass unemployment, the nature of the forces we are up against, and the need for a socialist society in order to win true job security.



Arm yourself with UNITY!

Workers are under the gun. To defend ourselves, we need information we can trust, and analysis to guide us in the battles ahead.

UNITY provides both. It gives a working class perspective on labor issues, the international situation, the oppressed nationality movements, the fight for disarmament, student and community struggles.

UNITY has exposed conditions in the electronics industry, exploded the myth that Japanese workers are stealing our jobs, taken a hard look at automation, covered the anti-concessions movement in auto and steel, and printed an intimate account of the 1982 garment strike that paralyzed New York Chinatown. It gives ongoing coverage to the unemployed workers movement, and regularly opens its pages to worker correspondents.

UNITY is published twice monthly in English and Spanish by the League of Revolutionary Struggle (M-L), a nationwide, multinational communist organization whose ideology is Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought.

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