

WORKERS OF ALL COUNTRIES, UNITE!

The Workers' Advocate Supplement



50¢

Vol. 2 #9

VOICE OF THE MARXIST-LENINIST PARTY, USA

December 10, 1986

Trends in the strike movement

**Speech at the Third National Conference
of the Marxist-Leninist Party
Fall 1986**

The Third National Conference of the MLP, USA was held under the slogans **Rank-and-file action against the Reaganite offensive!** and **Build the workers' movement as a revolutionary movement!** It centered on communist work in the workers' movement. Defying the opportunists who have bowed down to demoralization and liquidationism in the era of Reaganism, the conference discussed the experience of the Party in carrying out the revolutionary orientation set forth by the Second Congress of our Party at the end of 1983. It looked the difficulties of work in this period straight in the eye. But at the same time it summed up the successes of the Party in dealing with the sparks of working class struggle and the various streams of revolt that exist even in the depth of the present ebb in the mass struggle. And it analyzed that the present economic crisis and capitalist offensive is building up conditions for a new upsurge of the class struggle.

The resolutions of the conference have been published in the Nov. 15, 1986 issue of the **Workers' Advocate**. In this issue of the **Supplement** we begin the publication of a number of speeches from this conference. They have been edited for publication.

The following speech from the conference pointed to the struggle of trends in the workers' movement. The revival of the strike movement has not turned the trade union bureaucrats into fighters for the working class, but has deepened the fight between the paths of class collaboration with the capitalists and mass struggle against the capitalists. And the path of class struggle cannot be maintained without remaining vigilant against the antics of the "left" union bureaucrats who say that they are against concessions, but in practice seek to keep the workers chained to maneuvering within the labor bureaucracy and to modified or creative concessions dressed up as great victories.

the trends in the strike movement.

It was not too long ago that it was hard to even speak of a strike movement. After 1979 -- when the bourgeoisie launched its vicious concessions drive with the takeback contract at Chrysler -- the strike movement virtually collapsed. The ferocity of the capitalists' attack, the large scale plant closings and layoffs, and the complete capitulation of the union bureaucracy all came together to stun the workers and to disorganize their struggle. By 1985 the strike movement actually reached its lowest point since the time of sparse strike struggles during the very first years of the Great Depression of the '30s.

But in the middle of 1985 there was a turn. The
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Comrades, I've been asked to make a few points on

exert their influence to castrate the class struggle of the Nicaraguan workers against capitalism and for proletarian revolution. For this reason it is the duty of the workers' movement to denounce the capitulationist and opportunist practice of the two revisionist parties in Nicaragua, which shows itself, in the economic, as well as in the political, realms: the workers' movement has only to recall how in the economic struggle the "socialists" wanted to drag the proletariat back to economist positions, depriving it of its political hegemony, and sometimes big struggles have been betrayed by these opportunist leaders.

For a hard struggle against the revisionists, who still have influence, and for the political independence of the rank-and-file of the workers, isolating the opportunist leaders, and denouncing their practice of conciliating with the class enemy!

[1] UDEL was an opposition coalition of the liberal

bourgeoisie and the reformists in the days of Somoza. It was regarded favorably by American imperialism. [2] Alfonso Robelo was a major Nicaraguan capitalist and a prominent leader of the liberal bourgeois opposition to Somoza. He was a member of the ruling junta after the overthrow of Somoza -- until the Nicaraguan bourgeoisie decided it would be better to fight the revolution from outside the government. At that point Robelo ran off to become one of the founders and main leaders of the contra bands of murderers and thugs.

[3] Obando y Bravo, the Archbishop of Managua, at one time acted as a mediator between Somoza and the Sandinistas. After the revolution he became a prominent counterrevolutionary cleric who was raised to cardinal by the Vatican in recognition of his rabid opposition to the Nicaraguan revolution.

(Translation and notes by the **Workers' Advocate** staff.) <>

OUR WORK IN THE 1985 CHRYSLER STRIKE

Speech at the Third National Conference of the Marxist-Leninist Party, U.S.A. Fall 1986

The successes of the Party in linking up with the flurries of struggle in the present period verify the revolutionary line of the Second Congress of the Party. The following speech illustrates how the Party has been able to maintain links with the Chrysler workers despite the massive disruption to the struggle of these workers caused by major layoffs, the closing of plants which were centers of struggle, and the heavy pressure on these workers by the union bureaucrats who are working hand-in-glove with the auto monopolies to introduce more and more company union features into the UAW.

This is a speech on the work of a unit of the Detroit Branch of the Marxist-Leninist Party in the 1985 national Chrysler strike.

Comrades will remember that this was one among a number of important strikes in 1985 that marked that the workers were turning to struggle against the concessions offensive of the capitalists. The Chrysler workers, in 1979, were the first major section of the industrial workers to have concessions shoved down their throats. After that, the takeback disease spread like the plague through every industry. But in 1985, 70,000 Chrysler workers waged a militant strike for 12 days which broke down some of the concessions patterns. The fact that these workers, the first to suffer concessions, were fighting back was a significant blow to the capitalists' drive. It marked the begin-

ning of a fightback in the auto industry. And it inspired other sections of workers to take up the struggle.

One of the key features of this strike, and the reason that it was able to go as far as it did, was the independent initiative and militancy of the rank and file. This feature was sharply demonstrated by the wildcats, especially the one at Jefferson Assembly, that broke out hours before the contract deadline. Our Party played an important part in initiating and carrying out the early walkout at Jefferson Assembly. And that wildcat had a significant impact on the course of the national strike, pushing it forward to make various gains for the workers.

But how was the small force of our Party able to help develop the independent initiative of the workers and push forward this major strike of the auto workers?

There are two key points that I will make on this question.

The first is that our sharp, consistent, and long term agitation took root among the broad masses of workers. The success that we had in the Chrysler strike was the culmination of the persevering struggle our Party waged against concessions in the auto industry right from 1979. This was a fight that only our party -- the revolutionary Marxist-Leninist Party -- waged for years; the revisionist liquidators, on the other hand, carried out a disgusting love dance with the soldout union bureaucracy. This was a fight that included spreading among the workers literally hundreds and hundreds of thousands of leaflets and papers against concessions. It was this long-term fight, this courageous agitation, that allowed our Party to

gain influence among the workers. And this agitation, combined with the workers' bitter experience over six years, led to a broad section of workers, especially at Jefferson, becoming clear on the issues of the strike and becoming ready to go into battle over the heads of the UAW misleaders.

The second important feature of our work was that at Jefferson Assembly we were able to link up with and influence a network of militant workers which had been the force that had organized various wildcats, slowdowns, and other job actions for a year or so before the national strike. The 2nd Congress of our Party, in the resolution dealing with work in the factories, pointed out that workers "spontaneously set up various forms of organization to advance their fight" and that the Party "encourages and welcomes the spontaneous urge of the workers for organization" and "seeks to influence such organizations to adopt policies which are consistently and truly independent of the capitalists and the labor bureaucrats. In this way, the MLP strives to have these groups play their full role in the class struggle and to win them over to the side of revolutionary Marxism-Leninism." The network of militants at Jefferson was such a spontaneous organization, and it is together with this network that we organized the early walkout at Jefferson.

Preparations for the Strike

Now I'd like to go into our work in this struggle in more detail. The first point here is on our agitation leading up to the strike.

For at least four months before the strike we carried out agitation directly on the upcoming contract battle. We used virtually every peep by Chrysler and by the UAW leadership to expose their concession plans and to drive home three key issues the struggle was centering on: the fight for a payback for past concessions, for a big wage increase, and against job combination.

1) We used events like Chrysler buying up other corporations and the paying of million dollar bonuses to Iacocca and other top executives to expose what Chrysler was doing with the concessions' money stolen from the workers and to raise the demand that Chrysler must pay the workers back.

2) We exposed the scheme of UAW vice president Marc Stepp to replace wage increases with profit sharing and clarified the demand that the workers should get a big increase in their base wages in this contract.

3) We also exposed the maneuvers of Chrysler and the UAW to impose Saturn-type concessions. [On Jan. 9, 1985 GM had announced a new division, the Saturn Corporation, which would build a new car-making complex free from past contractual obligations. Speed-up, concessions, computer surveillance, etc. were to be imposed on the workers with UAW collaboration; the UAW leadership had been secretly meeting with GM since August 1983 to plan these concessions, and it exempted Saturn from the

provisions of the national UAW contract. The final agreement slashed work rules, job classifications, seniority protections, and guaranteed monthly pensions. Saturn became a model for further concessions throughout the auto industry.] We particularly stressed that on the top of their list was the plan to wipe out more jobs through a sweeping elimination of job classifications and work rules. We had some luck and a few coups too. At one point a committeeman informed us that the local contract being negotiated for Jefferson was the same as the Saturn-style agreement at the Sterling Heights Assembly plant. A contact at Sterling Heights gave us a copy so we were able to circulate it among the militants, and we carried out mass agitation denouncing the union leaders for collaborating with Chrysler in trying to impose it on the Jefferson workers. Through this agitation, and other things like the distribution of hundreds of buttons that said "No Job Combination!", we clarified that the workers had to fight against the elimination of job classifications and for job guarantees.

It should be pointed out that in this agitation we not only hit the top UAW leaders, but also the local union hacks. Wolf Lawrence, the Jefferson local UAW president, came into office on an anti-concessions ticket. But this was just a sham. So whenever he said anything indicating that he was soft on concessions, we nailed him. This was done so effectively that he began to shift his stands repeatedly and became known to the militants to be no better than the hated Marc Stepp.

So as the strike deadline approached we could see that our preparatory work was having its effect. Outside the plant workers were giving the TV and news-radio reporters the arguments and demands straight out of Party leaflets. There was none of this: "Uh, I don't know what the issues are -- go ask the union." Workers raised time and again the issues we emphasized: payback of old concessions, a big pay increase, and no cuts in job classifications. And they repeatedly voiced their distrust of the union bureaucrats.

Widespread agitation for years

Of course the influence of our timely leaflets on the contract was based on the workers' own conclusions from their bitter experience since 1979 and on our many years of agitation against concessions. This agitation had repeatedly exposed the union hacks and had encouraged mass actions organized independently of the hacks. We have been carrying out work in the auto plants for over a decade and at Jefferson since 1979. And this work has been helped by the very favorable situation for factory-gate distribution at the Jefferson Assembly plant.

In the last two years we have leafleted almost weekly at most gates on both shifts. The majority of the workers walk in, rather than drive in, to three of the four plant gates. Because of that, and because of the respect our agitation has gained, we get leaflets into the hands of almost half of the workers nearly

three times a month; and we get the **Workers Advocate** into the hands of over a fourth of the workers once a month.

Our widespread agitation against concessions and in support of the day-to-day fight in the plant has won us such respect that a wide section of the workers will say that they look to our leaflets to get "the truth" about what's going on. As well, our revolutionary stands against racist attacks, in defense of the unemployed, in support of the valiant fighters in South Africa, in Nicaragua, and so forth have also gained respect. This all-sided agitation, reaching a large percentage of the workers, and carried out over many years, was what gave us certain mass influence. This mass respect, combined with the bitter six-year experience with concessions, led the majority of workers to agree with our arguments and the demands we helped clarify for the contract struggle.

The Decision to Work for a Wildcat

Through our work before the strike it became clear that the workers were ready to fight. So two nights before the contract deadline the unit held a special meeting to sum up the situation and to formulate our plans.

Reports were given on the attitude of our militant contacts and the overall mood of the workers on the assembly lines. After an hour's debate the unit assessed that, not only were the workers sharply opposed to concessions and ready to strike, but also that they were strongly of the opinion that the union leaders were preparing to sell them out and they were ready to follow the militants in the plant into independent action.

From our years of experience in the auto workers' struggle we knew that early walkouts were a traditional form of protest by the rank and file. We felt that carrying out such a wildcat before the contract deadline would be an important way to help block the UAW leaders from being able to impose a last-minute concessions deal or extend the contract without a strike. A wildcat would also create the best conditions to make the strike a militant and successful one.

But how were we to bring about a wildcat? For this, work with the network of militants in the plant was crucial. After a good deal of debate, we decided to do verbal agitation among the militants (and more widely) for an early walkout at lunch time the night of the contract deadline; and we made plans for the walkout itself including producing picket signs containing the main demands of the workers (and signed with the Party's name).

The Networks of Militants in Auto

Now I should stop here for a minute and explain a few points about what this network of militants workers is.

Networks of militant workers have existed in the Detroit auto plants since at least the 1960's, even before the creation of the League of Revolutionary

Black Workers. Basically they are very loose, informal networks composed of militants who organize job actions of the workers in their own work group on the assembly lines. These are not rank-and-file caucuses, nor are they like other organizational forms which aim to influence or reform the union bureaucracy. Rather they are organizational forms that arise from holding direct job actions in the plant to alleviate immediate grievances. Such networks called many wildcats in the late 1960s. The massive heat walkouts in a series of plants in 1977 and 1978 -- including those our Party participated in at Dodge Main -- were organized by such networks. At Jefferson, the Tom Curry walkout in 1984 was pulled off by such a network.

I want to stress that these networks are extremely loose. To give you an idea of this, let me describe how wildcat strikes frequently develop:

An outrage at the plant happens. Militants go around and ask other militants to go outside the plant for lunch. Sometimes an informal meeting is held outside, but not always. The key thing is, if there are enough people who won't go back into the plant after the lunch break, then the workers stay out and the wildcat is on. Many times this is enough to shut down a key section of the assembly line, and then the whole line is stopped. Then, if the issues are hot enough and are known by wider sections of workers, others will walkout too.

Sometimes the job actions take the form of a mass refusal to work after a relief break, and other times it might be a slow down. But in each case they are organized by the militants, who have become trusted by the workers, and who pass the word to other trusted militants.

After the big layoffs in the auto industry most of these networks became disorganized because the militants were shifted out of their work unit, where they were most know and trusted by the mass of workers, and many militants were laid off altogether. At Jefferson this also happened. However, a large number of militants who had been organizing the wildcats at other Chrysler plants were transferred to Jefferson when their old plants were closed. Over a number of years, through a series of struggles, like the Tom Curry walkout, the militants began to link up with each other and formed a new network at Jefferson. So work at the Jefferson plant took on more importance for us.

Hard Work to Make Ties with the Network

For over a year before the national strike, we put a huge effort into trying to make contact with militants in this network. I should stress here that this was difficult work. Not only is this network quite loose, but also the militants' activity is still really limited in this period. They do not yet see the need for meetings away from the factory. Even inside the plant, they only become active during times of intense struggle.

To make contact with them we had to seize on

every opportunity. The activity of our unit in support of job actions was essential, for such actions were the chief time the network manifested itself. Through consistent, painstaking work, our unit mobilized itself and the pro-party activists around it to meet some of the other militants involved in job actions. Shortly before the contract deadline we made an all-out effort to get as many names and phone numbers as we could. Through over a year of work we had contact, on one level or another, with a portion of the network in a few key departments. We became a part of it to some extent. Based on this situation, we decided to try to help set this network into motion to organize the early walkout before the contract expired.

Into Action to Build the Wildcat

As soon as the special meeting was finished, comrades went into action to work for the early walkout. We quickly contacted a series of the militants and spread the word for a wildcat a good deal wider through verbal agitation inside the plant.

We got reports from workers in the network that they wanted to have a meeting in the parking lot before the afternoon shift started on the last day of the contract. The aim was to assess the possibility of an early wildcat. We made sure the pro-party activists showed up. A few dozen workers participated. After a period of discussion, these workers agreed to work to see if enough people could be brought out at lunch time.

Inside the plant the mood was tense. Foremen and union hacks went around trying to spread fear against the wildcat. But it didn't work. Militants ran around the plant on breaks assessing the situation. A stockman made his rounds and reported that the Trim Department was ready to go. Militants from Chassis and Final Assembly were also ready. As lunch time approached, workers started to put their tools away early and get their jackets on. Some workers shouted "On strike, shut it down!" on the assembly line to boost everyone's spirits.

At the gates, comrades eagerly waited with pickets signs and leaflets. At 8:30 p.m., one pro-party activist led an initial wave of 75 workers out the back gate of the plant. The workers grabbed up the picket signs and leaflets and a wild demonstration, which quickly grew to about 300 workers, filled the street. Workers were jumping up and down shouting slogans. One militant that we hadn't previously known literally grabbed a comrade and told him that he had been reading our leaflets for 7 years, that he knew we were Marxist-Leninists, and that we were right.

At the front gate things developed more slowly. Hundreds of workers milled around for a few minutes assessing the situation. People didn't take the picket signs right away. Then an old worker, who had been a contact of ours at Dodge Main, took some signs and started handing them out to his friends. Then a worker already in his car took one and began driving in circles in front of the plant honking his horn and

waving the sign. The rest of the signs were handed out in a minute or two. The mood instantly changed. Workers began shouting slogans. Workers with picket signs lined up to give TV interviews in which they did not fail to denounce Bieber and Stepp.

The years of pent up anger combined with the Party's agitation, and the picket signs it provided, made this into a visibly militant wildcat. Even the TV reporters were forced to report that this was an independent action, out of the control of the hacks at UAW's Solidarity House.

Significance of the Wildcat

There were also smaller and less militant wildcats at the Dodge Truck plant in Detroit and at the St. Louis Assembly plant. This meant that three of Chrysler's five assembly plants were out on strike before the contract had expired. But the Jefferson strike was the most significant because of its open defiance of the union bureaucrats and its militant street demonstrations.

The Party's analysis of the importance of the early wildcat was proven correct. The wildcats blocked any last minute deal that the UAW leaders and Chrysler might have cooked up to stop a strike without satisfying the workers' demands. At midnight UAW president Owen Bieber went on TV with a hangdog face, whining that the wildcats were unfortunate. The early walkout also set the fighting tone for the whole strike.

During the Rest of the Strike

The work we carried out in the wildcat also paved the way for other good work throughout the strike. Although the union hacks did not initially organize the rank and file for the picket lines, the workers spontaneously came out to man them. Some workers took the party's picket signs to picket duty; one was posted on a fence where it remained throughout the strike. At both Dodge Truck and Jefferson, comrades had wide-open access to the workers on the picket lines. Hacks who feebly tried to suppress the comrades were denounced by the workers. All in all, a whole series of militant contacts came up through our work around the strike and picket lines.

When the proposed contract was given to the workers we put out a leaflet detailing its provisions and calling for a no vote. The workers' militant struggle forced Chrysler to come up with \$2100 each in concessions payback. Chrysler was also forced to give the workers a wage increase, thus making a breach in the concessions pattern in the auto industry of replacing pay increases with profit sharing. As well, the sweeping elimination of job classifications was temporarily blocked. But we warned the workers that there were hidden concessions in the contract too: most importantly, the provision for plant-by-plant negotiations to eliminate job classifications. The contract provided for joint Chrysler/UAW committees to organize local job elimination, job combina-

tions, and the slashing of job classifications. (As well, the contract was to expire at a time that would cut off the Chrysler workers from other auto workers. There was a two-tier wage rate for new hires. The wage increase was small, and the concessions payback was a small fraction of the \$20,000 each the workers had given up.)

Many workers took these warnings to heart. At the Jefferson Assembly contract meeting we organized the denunciation of the contract and the UAW leaders. Faced with this harsh exposure, the hacks had to essentially shut the meeting down. It is significant that, even with the big bonus and all of the Chrysler/UAW leaders hype, 30% of all the Chrysler workers voted against the contract. It was widely said among the workers, "You can't trust the union hacks."

Undoubtedly this strike was a step forward. It, along with other strikes in this period, marked a turn to struggle against concessions. A part of the workers' demands were won. And the union bureaucrats, who tried to bottle up the struggle, did not gain

prestige from the advances. Our Party, on the other hand, gained greater influence among the masses of workers and strengthened its ties among the militants, not only at Jefferson but also at some other plants.

Conclusions

To sum up:

1) The long years of consistent agitation by the Party against concessions among the masses of workers finally bore fruit in this strike.

2) The Party was able to link up with the militant forms of workers' struggle that have spontaneously arisen in the plants and to influence the most militant section of workers and draw them closer to the Party.

3) The Party's work showed that a relatively small force can have much greater influence when it concentrates its work and carries out persistent work over time. <>

TRENDS IN THE STRIKE MOVEMENT

Continued from the front page

workers had accumulated five years of bitter experience with concessions. While the capitalists' profits rebounded to reach record highs, the workers were facing a second and even third round of concessions contracts. The old bourgeois lies began to lose their appeal. The workers' anger mounted. The bureaucrats' dam against struggle broke under the pressure. In July, 1985 over 50,000 workers poured out of the factories, mills, and shipyards in a number of bitter national strikes.

The Party, which has its finger on the pulse of the masses, quickly marked the turn. The front page lead of the August 5th issue of the **Workers' Advocate** declared: "Strike movement resumes!"

That article pointed out that, "As yet, this still represents only a small section of the working class. But it shows that the decline in activity of the workers' movement of the last few years...is gradually coming to an end. A new round of struggle is being prepared."

This estimate remains true up to the present. Since the turn in mid-1985, the strike movement has continued at a higher level than before. But this still can't be called an upsurge. If we take the twelve month period from July 1985 to June 1986 (for which we have the highly unreliable statistics from the government), it can be seen that the number of strikers is still only about half the number of those who were out before the strike movement collapsed in 1979. And they still represent only about one-fifth the number who were striking during the upsurge that

marked the end of the 1960's and the beginning of the 1970's.

This is the strike movement we are talking about. Not an upsurge but, nevertheless, a strike movement that marks a turn from the darkest years; a strike movement that provides a solid base for the Party's work; a strike movement that has the potential to prepare and inspire a new round of determined struggle by the working class.

Three major trends

What are the trends in this strike movement? If we speak broadly, three general trends can be pointed out.

The first is the trend of the masses of rank-and-file workers: the trend of mass picket lines, of big solidarity actions, of spreading strikes to other work places, of defiance to court injunctions and resistance to police repression. This is the first trend, the trend of class struggle.

The second trend is that of capitulation to the capitalists' concessions drive: the trend of opposition to strikes, of breaking up the organizations and solidarity of the workers, of subordination to the repressive laws and police forces of the bourgeoisie. In short, this is the trend of the union bureaucracy, the trend of class cooperation.

Vacillating between these two trends is another, third trend: the trend of posturing against concessions while limiting that fight to the most narrow reformism; of rhetorical outburst in favor of mass struggle while tying that struggle up in legalistic

knots. This is a trend that has come up from within the union bureaucracy itself, the trend of "left" union bureaucrats who -- caught between the rock of workers anger and the hard place of the diehard union sellouts -- are maneuvering to keep themselves from being crushed. This is the union bureaucrat opposition.

So comrades, these, in general terms, are the trends contending in the current strike movement. The further advancement of the strike movement depends, to a great extent, on the development of the struggle between these trends. It depends on how well we are able to help the workers combat the trend of class compromise; how well we expose the "left" union bureaucrats; how well we are able to encourage the independent motion of the workers.

Let's look at each of these trends in a little more detail and discuss, finally, the Party's work to orient the workers to build up the class struggle.

Features of the strike movement

The first thing I want to go into is the features of the mass strike movement, the features that mark the strikes of the masses of workers as they have turned to struggle in this period.

The first thing to point out here is the ferocity of the capitalists' attacks, because these attacks very much mark the strike movement and compel it in definite directions.

Obviously the concessions drive has taken a terrible toll. For example, since 1978 the average gross real weekly earnings of the workers have been cut by 10%. Part of this comes from direct wage cuts. But another part comes from the plant closings and large-scale layoffs which have forced workers into lower paying jobs.

Recently, there was a bourgeois study that showed that, of the workers who collected unemployment benefits from the layoffs in the depression period from 1979-83, only 48% of these workers were rehired. And of those rehired, fully 42% were forced into lower paying jobs. The study doesn't tell us what's happened to the other 58% who were not re-employed, but we know their lot has been terrible.

These enormous cuts in the workers' livelihood have been backed up by the most vicious strikebreaking. In this period, for example, we've seen the capitalists revive the tactic of lockouts. As well, the use of scabs is reaching vast proportions. Not long ago scabbing was almost exclusively a tactic against workers in the small shops of, at most, a few hundred workers. Now it's spread, becoming the usual tactic against strikes at workplaces with one or two thousand workers. And it's even being employed against bigger strikes. When workers strike today they have to be ready to fight the scabs. What's more, they have to be prepared to battle the reactionary laws and police forces that are always brought out to defend the scabs.

This ferocious assault by the capitalists has forced sections of workers who have long been idle, or only

in fragmentary struggles, into national strike struggles or strike waves. We've seen, for example, for the first time in fifteen years an east coast-wide strike by the longshoremen and the first national strike ever by the car haulers. One thing that stands out, in this regards, is the steel strikes. With the signing of the ENA (Experimental Negotiating Agreement) in 1973, and really since 1959, there had been virtually no strike struggle in the steel industry. But in the last two years we've seen bitter strikes at Wheeling-Pittsburgh, LTV, the first ever strike at the Ohio mill of ARMCO, and now the USX strike. Even with the outrageous sellout policy of the USWA hacks, the vicious capitalist onslaught has compelled the workers into battle.

Another feature of the strike movement is the growing length of the strikes and their greater intensity. Due to the vicious strikebreaking of the capitalists the struggles not only continue for months (and in some cases even years), but also mass picketing at the plant gates, defiance of court injunctions, bitter fights with scabs and police forces, all have become common scenes in the strike movement -- whether at the Watsonville canneries or the Los Angeles supermarkets or among the Baltimore longshoremen.

As well, there is a growing sense among the workers that the only way they can win their strikes is to band together, to spread the struggle wider. Solidarity actions have become frequent. Many times these have been big and potentially powerful events, like the rally of 17,000 Chicago workers who came out in support of the Chicago Tribune strikers.

Even more significant have been the number of cases where workers have refused to cross picket lines and have spread the strikes to much wider areas. Examples include the St. Louis Chrysler workers throwing up picket lines and shutting down a second Chrysler plant and the Main Central Railroad strike that spread to railyards through the entire Northeast. This trend of solidarity actions is quite significant because within it are the seeds that can blossom into truly class-wide actions, the seeds within today's separated and sporadic strikes that can grow into a truly class-wide struggle against the capitalists.

Now it's not yet possible to say that the strike movement has taken on a political character. But various of the strikes have had political implications, implications that -- when made conscious to the workers -- can help to build up the independent political movement of the working class. There have been a number of cases where the federal government has been moved to directly suppress strikes. Reagan's back-to-work order against the railroad workers, or the use of the national guard against the Hormel strikes, provide stark examples that expose the capitalist nature of the state and help us bring the workers to socialist conclusions. Other examples, like the role of Mayor Young in opposing the Detroit City workers' strike, help us expose the black bourgeois politicians, those liberal guardians of capital, and strengthen the class consciousness of the workers of

the oppressed nationalities.

Finally, comrades, there is one other feature in the current strike movement that I want to mention. That is the number of cases where the mass of workers have come sharply into contradiction with the top union bureaucrats and where they have launched strikes over the heads of those sellout hacks. Recently this trend has caused the bourgeoisie enough concern that **Business Week** has felt compelled to issue warnings about the "revolt of the rank and file."

There have been a number of strikes where the workers have rejected the contracts backed by the top union heads and gone on strike (like at General Dynamics); and where the workers have defied the union leaders' back-to-work orders (like the Detroit City workers' strike); and where the workers have gone out on wildcats to fight not only the company attacks but also to protest the sellout policy of the union bureaucracy (like the early walkouts at Jefferson Assembly, Dodge Truck and St. Louis Assembly in the national Chrysler strike). These struggles particularly show the motion towards independent action by the workers, motion that must be organized and further extended.

In the current strike movement we find all of these features, which are characteristic of the trend of the rank-and-file and show its gravitation to class struggle.

The stand of the union bureaucracy

This brings us to the second trend in the strike movement, the trend represented by the union bureaucracy.

Now I already pointed out that one feature of this trend is direct opposition to strikes and other forms of mass struggle. This is manifested in such things as the breaking up of industry and company-wide contracts and the scabbing of one section of union leaders against the workers from another union.

But here I want to point out another example that shows where the union bureaucrats stand. Comrades will remember the AFL-CIO Executive Board meeting that condemned the Hormel strike in Austin. Well, that meeting not only stood against the Hormel strike, but it also began a discussion about changing the AFL-CIO's constitution to allow the Executive Board to directly intervene in local unions to head off strikes or to suppress them once they've broken out.

The real significance of this AFL-CIO leadership discussion is shown clearly in a comment on it from the Chamber of Commerce. Mark A. Bernardo, who is the manager of labor law for the national apparatus of the Chamber of Commerce, declared that "It is yet to be seen how a larger role for the federation will translate into the marketplace." But, he continues, "It will be positive if it means a more cooperative, responsive movement, one that reins in the maverick locals, such as the one in Austin." (**New York Times**, May 4, 1986) The AFL-CIO honchos made it clear

with their attack on the Hormel strike that, indeed, they want to provide exactly what the Chamber of Commerce has ordered.

Now I want to emphasize here that, despite their strikebreaking role, you can not say that the union bureaucrats don't call any strikes. There are times the bureaucrats simply cannot overcome the rank-and-file pressure without a strike. And there are also times when the capitalists demands are so outrageous that the union bureaucrats simply can't weasel their way out of the contradiction. Such a strike, for example, was the one at Wheeling Pittsburgh.

But what policy do the hacks follow in such strikes, what are their aims? What we find is that everywhere they restrict the struggle, they bow down to the reactionary laws and the police, they keep the strikes under strict control, simply awaiting the moment to sellout the rank-and-file. What did the hacks fight for in the Wheeling-Pittsburgh conflict? They demanded a seat on the board of directors and a better system of labor-management cooperation. Such are the aims of the bureaucrats even when they take the workers out on strike.

So, comrades, what we see with the union bureaucracy is a step up of what is commonly known as business unionism, of the union honchos actually becoming a part of the management machinery to crack the whip over the workers. It is little wonder that such a craven policy, in the face of the tidal wave of capitalist encroachments, has led to the decline of the unions; in fact, there has been a loss of some four million members from the unions in just the last seven years. Faced with such losses, the union bureaucrats have not turned to struggle and militant organizing drives. Instead they have turned even further to business unionism.

Typical of their schemes is the AFL-CIO hack's latest effort to attract members by offering low-interest Mastercard credit cards. Meanwhile, the USWA [steel workers] bureaucrats have gone right to the heart of the matter. At their recent convention the bureaucrats changed the USWA constitution to allow supervisors into the union. According to Leon Lynch, the USWA vice-president for human affairs, this constitutional change was essential to "take advantage of the fertile field of union organizing: middle management." Such is the business unionism of our modern labor bureaucrats.

What stands out is that business unionism, and the extreme imperialist chauvinism that accompanies it, is not only the policy of the most right-wing bureaucrats, but is also the policy of the social-democratic wing of the trade union leadership. It took the social-democratic bureaucrats of the UAW [auto workers] to set a model of what is called "new, modern labor agreements" with the Saturn pact. This agreement, reached years before the plant has even been built or workers hired, is quite literally the contractual expression of the policy of "What's good for GM is good for the workers." And the bureaucrats from one union after another have come forward to hail it as just what they had in mind for their own workers.

Features of the "left" bureaucrats

This policy of class collaboration has, as I pointed out above, earned the hatred of the masses of workers; it has led to the development of a certain motion independent of and against the bureaucrats. But it has also given rise to some "left"-posturing bureaucrats who are standing up to block the left-ward motion of the masses and to contain them within the old, corrupt bureaucratic channels.

Now we've gotten a good deal of experience with this trend which has come up at many work places, and in various industries, taking different forms at different times. As yet, the only really nation-wide form this "left" bureaucrat trend has taken has been the so-called National Rank and File Against Concessions (NRAFAC). It contains bureaucrats who we have been fighting at a number of places. Later we will have a speech on a certain plant where we are in a particularly sharp, toe-to-toe battle with them. [Not contained in this issue of the Supplement.] But to give you another idea here of their role in the current strike struggles against concessions, let me turn to the example of Fred Neufeld.

Neufeld is the National Secretary of NRAFAC. He is also the Executive Secretary of Local #9 of the shipbuilders, which recently signed a new contract at Todd's Los Angeles shipyards.

The Todds' workers have seen their pay dwindle under a four year wage-freeze. But, unlike other yards in the northwest, LA-Todds has not suffered massive layoffs. The LA-Todds' yards have retained some 3000 workers, and these workers were angry and in a relatively good position for struggle.

Now, Neufeld has constantly spoken against concessions. As well, he has repeatedly called for a united struggle of the shipyards workers throughout the West coast, and he has wide connections with other union officials throughout the yards. So what did he do this fall when the contracts came up for Todds-LA and most of the northwestern yards? Did he take the Todds-LA workers out on strike against concessions? Do he use their relatively stronger position to set an example to help the workers in the other yards join them in a united strike against the concessions drive of the shipyard capitalists and the navy? Of course not.

Our comrades in Seattle exposed the fact that Neufeld, rather than organize a struggle, saddled the Todds-La workers with another wage-freeze and other concessions, including a two-tier wage structure and drug testing for new hires. Nevertheless, Neufeld declared this concessions contract to be a great victory against concessions. In fact, the NRAFAC newspaper, the **Unifier**, carried a major article hailing the contract for supposedly "beating back a drive for major concessions sponsored by the corporation and the Pentagon." Meanwhile, the paper covered up the actual concessions the contract contained. What bold liars are our "left" bureaucrats.

Now there is one statement in this article that speaks louder than anything else about the reputed

militancy of these bureaucrats, and I can't restrain myself from quoting from it. The article points out that the workers had suffered a wage freeze for four years and that they "are bitter about the wage freeze and resentful at a corporation like Todd which makes millions in profits and won't get off a dime for a raise." So why didn't Neufeld fight for a wage raise? The article says, "However, the possibility of getting a raise seemed impossible. The Navy has told labor and management, both publicly and privately that there will be no more wage raises for shipyard workers." That's all. Can you believe it?

When was the last time you remember either the monopolies or their government saying, "well, gee, we sure want all you workers to get raises." Why, the very definition of the concessions drive is that the capitalists as a class, headed up by the Reagan government, are saying "no more raises, give us take-backs". If the workers wait on the capitalists and their government to change their mind on this question then they will wait forever. But this is Neufeld's policy -- **they** said no raises and so **we** wouldn't even consider fighting for them.

Such craven capitulation -- combined with the loudest shouting against concessions and with the heaviest posturing for struggle -- is the essence of this whole trend of the "left" bureaucrats.

Now when the pressure against the bureaucrats becomes intense, the posturing of this "left" bureaucratic trend may attract a section of workers who see this as a breach in the bureaucratic front. The "left" bureaucrats may set up organizations that these workers join (at present NRAFAC excludes anyone but union officials). To the extent that militants gather in or around such organizations, and to the extent that these organizations wage any actual struggle, it is or may be necessary to work around or within these organizations. But that work must be oriented not towards conciliation with the union bureaucracy, but towards driving a wedge between the militants and the apologists of the union bureaucracy. What is more, it is subsidiary work that must always and everywhere be subordinated to the work of building up real fighting organizations, strong organizations which can mobilize the masses of workers into independent action against the capitalists' concessions drive and which can carry out consistent agitation against the capitalists and the treachery of the union bureaucracy. This is exactly the work the Party has been carrying out in the last period.

The Party's work in the strike movement

Comrades, our Party has been part of the trend of the masses, the trend of mass struggle. And the Party has worked hard to make the workers conscious of their own strength and to expose the traitorous role of the top union hacks, indeed of the entire union bureaucracy that sits like a lead weight on the backs of the workers. Here I would like to briefly touch on the Party's work in the strike movement over the last two years.

In the first place, there is the agitation of the Party. The **Workers' Advocate** has given extensive attention to the strike movement. Indeed, in the last year we have devoted an average of over three pages in each issue of the paper to the strike movement, the largest amount devoted to any single front of agitation. This agitation has covered all the major strikes and many of the smaller ones. What is more, it has dealt with the important developments in the strike movement, analyzing the twists and turns, and encouraging every step forward. Both through short, timely exposures and through more detailed articles, the Party has provided hard-hitting agitation against the union bureaucracy and kept up the fire against the "left" bureaucrats as well. In all of this we have paid special attention to trying to encourage the independent motion of the rank and file. And we have pointed out the militant and essential role of the Party for the advance of the strike movement.

This kind of agitation in the **Workers' Advocate** has only been possible because the Party's branches and units have been active in the strike movement and played a significant role in a number of struggles. At this conference we are going to have speeches detailing the work in a number of struggles. But here I'll just give an overview of our work.

Although our Party is small, and is only in a handful of cities, we were active in a large number of strikes. According to the incomplete information I have, it appears the Party was able to participate in around one-fifth of the major strikes that took place in the last two years. This participation was at various levels, from solidarity work to directly influencing strikes. But all of it was essential for carrying out consistent work to guide the mass struggle.

In many cases we participated in the solidarity rallies that were held in support of certain strikes, even traveling to Austin, Minnesota for rallies there. This work was important not only to encourage the strikers, but in a number of cases party activists were able to bring other sympathetic workers and militants with us, which helped educate them in class solidarity

and show them the fight between the trends in the strike movement.

There are also a series of strikes in which we participated in the workers' picket lines, including confrontations like the occupation of the district school office during the Oakland teachers' strike. In this work too we were able, in some cases, to bring along workers from other workplaces where we have influence.

In the course of this work we were able to make new contacts, to link up with militants, and to influence spontaneous organizations that have arisen in a few cases. In some cases we were able to exercise a general influence on sections of the workers who were in struggle. Whether it was the workers posting up our leaflets at NYNEX and in the NY transit barns, or our work to organize the early walkout at Jefferson Assembly which helped push forward the national Chrysler strike, in such cases our Party comrades showed themselves not only as militant defenders of the workers' interests but also as the active and leading factor pointing out the path for struggle.

So comrades, this concludes my remarks on the trends in the strike movement and our Party's role in it. This experience of the last two years shows that we have been able to advance in the work of strengthening our ties with the masses by seizing on the flurries of mass struggle, even the smallest ones, to link up with our class, to encourage the independent motion of the workers, and to further build up the influence and organizational work of the Party deep among the rank-and-file workers. The correctness of this Marxist-Leninist orientation is why the renewal of the strike movement has provided impetus for the Party's work. We must continue to develop revolutionary work in the workers' movement so that the workers' struggles are advanced and so the workers are imbued in a truly class perspective. This is the path that can turn the potential which can be glimpsed in the present-day struggles into a reality of class-wide struggle against the capitalists. <>