



White and black workers have historically united to fight for basic democratic rights such as the fight against discriminatory trade unions and industries and police repression. The fight for democratic rights continues today.

SUPERSENIORITY AND THE UNITY OF THE PROLETARIAT

The working class movement places complex political problems before communists and class conscious workers. One such issue is superseniority*. National minorities and women have spontaneously demanded superseniority as a response to continued national oppression on the job. In turn, many white workers have protested that this is merely "reverse discrimination."

The issue facing communists and class conscious workers is this: Under what conditions would we uphold the seniority system and when would we struggle to modify it in the interest of national minorities or women? In every case, we seek to unite the proletariat. Workers struggled for many years against the capitalists to establish seniority rights. Without the protection of the seniority system, the capitalists can blatantly discriminate against workers even more -- based on sex, nationality, age, and political beliefs by laying-off or transferring whomever they please. The August 29th Movement (M-L) opposes superseniority as a reform that would only further divide the working class. We uphold, on the other hand, all efforts of affirmative action including preferential hiring, special training programs, and preferential promotions to skilled jobs. The fight to win these demands, carried out under communist leadership, will help eliminate the national oppression faced by minorities and help unite the proletariat. To fully grasp this question, we must first examine an issue little understood in our movement - bribery and privileges.

* Superseniority allows special seniority privileges in regard to "bumping" and lay-offs. Many union contracts, for example, give transferred superseniority to shopstewards. During cutbacks stewards are the last to be bumped out of their departments; they are the last in the plant to be laid off -- regardless of their number of years working for the company.

SUPERPROFITS -- SOURCE OF BRIBERY AND PRIVILEGES

U.S. capitalism developed into monopoly capitalism (imperialism) long ago. One of the principle features of monopoly capitalism is the territorial and economic partition of the world, that is, the exploitation and oppression of nations by a handful of advanced industrialized countries. A small number of imperialist powers live off the labor of the oppressed and colonized people. The imperialists are able to extract profits over and above profits that are normal all over the world -- superprofits. U.S. imperialism has seen an uninterrupted flow of superprofits from countries in Latin America, Asia, Africa as well as from its own Chicano and Black nations.

Two world wars devastated the European imperialist powers. After each war, the U.S. grew stronger in relation to its rivals. Particularly after World War II, the U.S. penetrated the European market through huge investments and loans. It was able to take over the colonial possessions of the weakened European powers. The U.S. dominated the capitalist world economically, politically, and militarily -- it became a superpower. It is now confronted with another superpower, the U.S.S.R., which also reaps superprofits from its subject nations like Cuba, Angola, etc. As a superpower, the U.S. is able to even further expand its superprofits.

To get a rough picture of what these superprofits mean, we cite the following example from the Afro-American nation in the Black Belt South. We can see the large difference in wages paid to Anglo-American workers and Afro-Americans. This difference amounts to billions in extra profits for U.S. imperialism.

In 1970 Blacks as a whole earned only 54% of the annual income of Whites. In their southern homeland they earned only 47% as much as White workers throughout the country. Blacks as a whole in 1969 earned \$1,465 less per capita than Whites, and the situation is worst of all for Black women workers who earned only 47% of the yearly income of White male workers in 1972.

Per Capita Income of Blacks Compared to Whites (1970)

Blacks (north and south):	\$ 1,818	
Blacks (south):	1,439	
Whites (north and south):	3,383	
Whites (south):	3,072	
Black women:	5,692	Annual Earnings of full-time
White men:	12,166	Black women workers (1972):
White women:	6,625	(compared to White men and
		women workers)

For the imperialists, these superprofits mean even more luxury and greater money for investment elsewhere. What does it mean for the U.S. working class? It means that imperialism has bought off a sector of the class, the labor aristocracy, with economic bribes. As a result of the United State's position as a superpower, the U.S. has been able to raise substantially the standard of living of a large section of the working class. It has helped keep the class consciousness of the working class at an embryonic level. It means that imperialism has tremendous reserves with which to further bribe the labor aristocracy and to give out concessions. The ability of the imperialists to dole out bribes and privileges decreases with the growing economic crisis, but these sops will continue in some form as long as imperialism exists.

The labor aristocracy is one of the main imperialist tools to divide the working class.

Superprofits have spawned a strata of parasitic union officials, labor lawyers, labor research experts, and others who occupy high salaried positions within the trade union bureaucracy. Imperialism has doled out higher wages and extra benefits to sections of the craft unions such as the carpenters, boilermakers, operating engineers, and others. These labor aristocrats and bureaucrats enjoy considerably higher wages than the average worker, tend to live in segregated housing, enjoy better medical and educational facilities, etc.

In the craft trades plumbers (in 1974) enjoyed the highest average hourly rate at \$9.00. Closely behind them are the bricklayers at \$8.97 and electricians at \$8.96. The lowest paid construction trade rate is for painters at \$8.07. In contrast to the craft trades, assembly line workers (unionized) averaged between \$3 and \$5.50 an hour. In addition to wages, workers in the craft trades enjoy advantages not readily available to other workers. For example, many become instructors in trade and vocational schools or sales representatives for building supply companies. A large number of craft workers have become contractors in the home building field. These are only a few examples of the privileges enjoyed by the labor aristocracy.

To a certain extent even the mass of the working class benefit from the superprofits of imperialism. Anglo-Americans enjoy higher standards of living, broader democratic rights (the right to speak English, for example), and higher educational levels. Some of these economic and political rights were won in the heat of fierce class struggle, but the bourgeoisie has been more willing to grant these concessions to members of the oppressor nation proletariat than to minorities.

Lenin explained the objective differences between the oppressor and oppressed nation proletariat:

“(1) *Economically*, the difference is that sections of the working class in the oppressor nations receive crumbs from the *superprofits* the bourgeoisie of these nations obtains by extra exploitation of the workers of the oppressed nations. Besides, economic statistics show that here a *larger* percentage of the workers become ‘straw bosses’ (foremen - ATM) than is the case in the oppressed nations, a larger percentage rise to the labor *aristocracy*. That is a fact. To a *certain degree* the workers of the oppressor nations are partners of their *own* bourgeoisie in plundering the the workers (and the masses of the population) of the oppressed nations.

(2) *Politically*, the difference is that, compared with the workers of the oppressed nations, they occupy a *privileged* position in many spheres of political life.

(3) *Ideologically*, or spiritually, the difference is that they are taught at school and in life, disdain and contempt for the workers of the oppressed nations.” (all emphasis in the original) “A Caricature of Marxism” - (LCW 23:55-6)

We must understand the difference between bribery and privilege. The bribed labor aristocrats and bureaucrats are **in the direct service of imperialism**. Because of the material benefits they derive from imperialism, they consciously carry out its needs. We can see the role of the union bureaucrats in crushing wildcat strikes or the role played by certain sectors of the construction trades in supporting the Vietnam War in the 60's.

The mass of workers in the U.S. aren't bribed. They receive certain political and social privileges which the bourgeoisie uses to divide the class; but this is a non-antagonistic contradiction. In the main, we struggle to bring up the political, economic, and social level of the oppressed nationalities. This will mean that some oppressor nation workers will have to forgo further advantages. For example, we would struggle for the rights of national minority workers to fill skilled jobs — even ahead

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of a white worker with more seniority. In certain situations the oppressor nation proletariat will have to make short term sacrifices for the long term interests of the proletariat. In order to make up for past discrimination, some white workers may not be hired at a plant because of preferential hiring of minorities.

A Marxist-Leninist understanding of bribery and privilege is entirely different from the bourgeois "white skin privilege" theory. Developed by petty bourgeois elements within the Students for a Democratic Society in the 1960's, this theory essentially states that all white workers are "bought off" (i.e. bribed) by imperialism and that unity of the working class is impossible until whites "give up" their privileges. Under this theory, white workers become the accomplices of imperialism in oppressing national minorities. The Weathermen (an SDS faction) took this theory to its logical conclusion and proclaimed white workers to be the enemy unless they took up guerilla struggle in "support of Third World people". In short the white skin privilege theory turns a contradiction among the people into a contradiction between the people and the enemy.

SOME WORKING CLASS HISTORY

As mentioned earlier, the working class has struggled long and hard to establish the seniority system. From the beginning of the longshore industry to the 1930's, longshoremen had worked without a seniority system. Every morning, the capitalists would force workers to "shape up" in front of the docks. Hundreds of men would compete daily for jobs, never sure from day to day if they would work again. When workers were too old or disabled, they had no job. In 1933, S.F. dock workers had to lead a city-wide general strike in order to win their demands for a hiring hall and seniority system. The vast majority of workers in the U.S. still work at the whim of the capitalist. 75% of U.S. workers are not unionized, almost all of them subject to firing or demotion at any time. One of the first demands in any union drive is for a equitable seniority system to protect the rights of workers. The most progressive demand is for plant-wide seniority to cover all lay-offs and transfers during cutbacks.

Like any reform, the bourgeoisie will always attempt to twist it to their own needs. The seniority system is no exception. Forced to accept the seniority system in union shops, the capitalists utilized it as a means to increase their discrimination against oppressed nationalities and, in many cases, women.

Let's take a look at the longshore industry today.

Afro-Americans are employed as longshoremen in greater percentages than in any other industry. They are mostly concentrated in the Gulf Coast states. On the West Coast they have suffered widespread discrimination, including denial of skilled jobs, (with the exception of San Francisco/Oakland dock work). The ports of Los Angeles /Long Beach and Portland, Oregon were closed to Afro-Americans until most recently. The Portland docks, discriminated blatantly against Afro-Americans through 1971. This discrimination was done in close collaboration with the trade union bureaucrats of a reformist and revisionist led union. In a 1961-64 study, prepared by the Oregon Bureau of Labor, it was found that:

"Local 8 of International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union, Portland, Oregon, did have an unwritten policy and system that kept Negroes from being employed as longshoremen on the Portland, Oregon waterfront. It was established at this time that Local 8 of Portland, Oregon was the only ILWU union on the West Coast who openly made it known that they did not want Negro Longshoremen." (Northrup, *Negro Employment In Maritime Industries, The Negro Struggle for Waterfront Jobs*, page 145.)

Where there are slaves, there are slave rebellions; the wage slaves of capitalist America are no exception. Fighting against the national oppression like that of the longshore industry in Portland, workers have demanded preferential hiring, training, and preferential promotions to skilled jobs for minority workers. Through mass struggle in the construction trades in the early 1970's some Black, Latin, and Asian workers have won these demands.

Responding to the deepening imperialist economic crisis and to some of these spontaneous struggles, the courts have begun to twist the legitimate demands of the masses. In the middle of 1976, the California courts settled a race and sex discrimination suit for the cannery industry by allowing a small number of Chicanos to jump the seniority list into full-time and skilled jobs -- thus bumping higher seniority workers of all nationalities.

On June 25th, hundreds of cannery workers demonstrated in San Francisco against this settlement, affecting 74 Northern California food processing plants. They demanded a single plant wide seniority list based on date of hire. The canneries have historically discriminated by keeping two separate seniority lists: "full-time" workers (who just happen to be the mostly white skilled trades), and "part-time" (a vast majority of Black and Latin workers). Some of the Black and Latin workers have 15-20 years seniority, but still work part-time. Plantwide seniority would mean that for the first time, minorities could work year round and have a chance for skilled jobs. Mass pressure from the rank and file workers forced the Teamster leadership (who represent most cannery workers in California) to negotiate a seniority system based on date of hire.

The workers' demand for plantwide seniority correctly fought the traditional discriminatory practices of the canneries and helped break down the privileges of the largely Anglo skilled workers. Previously, White workers would be hired off the street for skilled jobs when there were qualified minorities working at the plant. A plantwide seniority system would help eliminate these privileges. In this situation, communists should have demanded affirmative action on job training for skilled jobs and immediate promotion of minorities to those jobs as they became available.

The bourgeoisie and the union bureaucrats want the working class to look at the question of seniority as absolute: Either you support it under all conditions or you oppose it. The bureaucrats oppose *any* modification of the seniority system, most especially demands that promote the interests of minorities or women. The proletariat, on the other hand, views the question of a particular seniority system concretely, does this system help to unite or divide the working class? The principle of lay-off according to plantwide seniority is correct; but the bourgeoisie will often use other aspects of the seniority system to maintain national oppression.

In many plants with union contracts, the seniority system also covers promotion to skilled jobs and in some plants bidding for unskilled jobs as well. When a job becomes available, the company posts a notice and workers are supposed to be awarded the job based on seniority. In fact, most capitalists find a means of skipping over the higher seniority worker if they don't like them. Because most national minorities have only been hired in recent years and because the racist educational system has denied them the skills for high paying jobs, this aspect of the seniority system often perpetuates national oppression.

Communists and class conscious workers must support affirmative action programs to overcome these manifestations of national oppression, even if it means modifying the seniority system. For example, we would support demands to promote national minority workers to every skilled job that opens up (or every other job) until they make up a certain percentage of skilled workers. We would not demand that White workers give up the skilled jobs they currently hold, but make the demand only for new job

openings.

We take a similar position on the question of hiring of new workers. The seniority system as such is not a question here since seniority only begins with the date of hire.

Communists must support demands for preferential hiring. In industries which have failed to hire certain national minorities or women, we must demand hiring of only minorities (or hiring 50% minorities) until the percentage of minority workers at the plant reaches a certain level. (The same demand could apply to women.)

Why does the demand for affirmative action, when carried out in a revolutionary way, help unite the class? Why will the demand for superseniority divide the class? The essence of the call for superseniority is for White workers to give up their jobs so that minorities or women can stay working. This demand will directly put the burden of the economic crisis onto the backs of the White workers. The capitalist is off the hook. Most assuredly, the reaction from White workers will be strong and probably violent. Thus a contradiction among the people would become an antagonistic contradiction. Affirmative action, on the other hand, helps promote unity. No Anglo worker will be required to give up their present job (skilled or otherwise). Anglo workers will have to forgo further advantages in the interest of multi-national unity. In the case of preferential hiring, Anglos will have to make temporary sacrifices for the long term interest of the working class. Communists must be demanding more jobs and no lay-offs as a means of showing the common unity of all workers.

For the working class to become the leading class in revolution, it must lead the fight for democratic rights. Only in this way can we help forge a strategic alliance between the working class and oppressed nationalities.

What then are the correct demands to raise in order to unite the proletariat? The growing imperialist crisis will continue to cause lay-offs and inevitably minorities and women will bear the brunt. We must demand the following:

1. No lay-offs
2. Full and indefinite sub-benefits. Under these plans the capitalist must make up the difference between the worker's regular paycheck and their unemployment insurance. This benefit must continue during the entire lay-off period.
3. In cases where the capitalist has discriminated against national minorities or women, those people must be paid an additional 5% penalty fee in addition to sub-benefits. In this manner, the capitalists will be forced to pay for their past discrimination.

As long as state power rests with the capitalists, the best democratic reforms will remain as partial victories. As we have seen, the capitalists will attempt to use any progressive reform to further counter-revolution. Even the most free bourgeois democratic republic will continue the exploitation of the working class and oppression of national minorities and nations. Only the establishment of the dictatorship of the working class will resolve this oppression. Under socialism, the working class would continue the same kinds of programs which we have advocated here. That is, with a planned socialist economy, there would be no lay-offs. A people's government would take special care to develop industry in the oppressed nations of the Black Belt and Southwest. National minority workers would be trained and promoted rapidly for skilled jobs. Special minority institutes would be established for training minority workers, and helping to develop their culture and language. In short, the proletarian state will overcome the past discrimination and oppression which capitalism promotes today.

The realization of these lofty objectives are within our grasp. Led by a truly proletarian communist party, the working class of the U.S. is capable of winning a socialist revolution. The spontaneous movement of the oppressed nationalities and of the working class is in a great upsurge. The alliance between the national movements and the working class is being forged in the heat of class struggle. With a correct political and ideological line, communists can lead and organize these struggles.

Workers And Oppressed People Of The World Unite!