

# Preface

During the past ten year period we have seen a significant upsurge of rank and file militancy across the country and in practically every industry. The rebellion from the base has spared no union bureaucracy, and in some cases has been successful in toppling entrenched leadership.

Rank and file newsletters are being distributed in press shops, hospitals, tailor shops, school staff rooms, and truck stops. Elections are no longer mere back-slapping formalities, contract negotiations can no longer be concluded in friendly back room tete-a-tetes, and discriminatory practices are being challenged more and more frequently. The bigoted labor lieutenants of capital must at least pay lip service to the struggle against racism, and women are finally making their voices heard over the drone of white male officials.

During the same period there has been a renewal of communist activity. Several national organizations and numerous local collectives, having repudiated the right opportunist politics of the revisionist Communist Party USA, have taken up the task of developing a revolutionary practice in the workers movement in pursuit of founding an authentic vanguard party.

## **RANK AND FILE MOVEMENT LACKS CONSCIOUS LEADERSHIP**

In spite of this activity, the rank and file movement and the anti-revisionist communist movement for the most part exist independent of each other. The rank and file movement suffers from political narrowness, disorganization, and division. Its horizons rarely extend beyond the next contract or union election. Caucuses come and go, and there is little in the way of national organization even in particular unions. Because the dominant tendency is to leave the struggle against racism and sexism to national minority and women workers, the multinational unity and the level of participation by women workers in the movement is weak and uneven.

In short, the movement lacks developed class conscious leadership. And for the most part, Marxist-Leninists have not been able to provide and develop this missing ingredient in spite of considerable effort and activity. The dominance of dogmatism and sectarianism within the Marxist-Leninist movement has effectively retarded the whole process of fusing Marxism-Leninism and the workers movement.

The working class is paying and paying dearly in the absence of this merger. In the face of falling real wages, deteriorating working conditions, massive layoffs, and cut-backs in social services, the working class has not succeeded in mounting any serious challenge to the monopolists. The labor bureaucracy and their political counterparts in the Democratic Party have effectively contained the discontent in the ranks by alternately repressing it or defusing it through token efforts at action or electoral support for "labor's friends". Communists have with few exceptions been confined to the sidelines and have not succeeded in elaborating a course of action that could counter the class collaborationist leadership.

This failure represents a roadblock on the highway to the formation of a vanguard party. It is only in the process of merging Marxism-Leninism with the workers movement that a new communist party can be achieved. It is in this context that the trade union question takes on its centrality in this period.

## **TRADE UNIONS: ARENA FOR FUSION**

The trade unions are the central arena for winning over the advanced workers and through this asserting vanguard leadership. The trade unions are the most important mass organizations of the working class. They are the first line of defense in the struggle against capital. They encompass the most socialised and thus politically conscious sections of the class. It is in the rank and file movement within the trade unions that the advanced workers are most concentrated and numerous.

The ability of the Marxist-Leninist movement to win over the advanced workers is synonymous with our ability to elaborate a theory and practice capable of providing political leadership to the broad workers movement. Active leadership requires a correct handling of the trade union question — that is, the role of the trade unions in the revolutionary process, the present-day character of the unions, and the strategy and tactics for making them instruments of class struggle.

The absence of this understanding is a large part of why the Marxist-Leninist movement remains largely isolated. Few Marxist-Leninist organizations have made a concrete analysis of the trade union question, and some even deny that



it constitutes a special question. There is a tendency which belittles and deliberately rejects the role of communist leadership in the broad workers movement in the name of concentrating on the advanced workers.

These "dialecticians" erect a Chinese Wall between propaganda and agitation, between building a left-center alliance and winning the advanced.

It is our understanding that we can *only* win over the advanced in the context of providing leadership to the broader ranks of workers. . . that while the task of winning the advanced workers is clearly the primary one in this particular period, it cannot be approached in isolation from the development of a class conscious workers movement.

#### ULTRA-LEFTISM AND SECTARIANISM

Among the Marxist-Leninist forces who reject a purely propagandistic approach to the advanced workers and who recognize the need to provide communist leadership to the workers movement, the dominance of ultra-leftism and sectarianism is the principal problem. Voluntarism and adventurism characterize the efforts of all too many Marxist-Leninists' work in the effort to revolutionize the trade unions.

The ultra-leftists tend to equate all trade union officialdom with the labor bureaucracy. They approach the task of isolating and defeating the bureaucracy with the premise that exposure of the "hacks" can be substituted for the workers' own experience in struggle. They confuse middle forces with backward elements. These left errors have severely hampered communist work in the unions and restricted communist influence.

If genuine Marxist-Leninists are going to rectify this situation, an ideological struggle must be waged to defeat dogmatism and ultra-leftism on the trade union question. Simultaneously, Marxist-Leninists must continue and expand their efforts to win over the advanced workers and build a class struggle movement in the trade unions. It is to both these tasks that this pamphlet is addressed.

#### GOALS OF THIS PAMPHLET

The first two sections of the pamphlet are Part I and Part II of the PWOC's trade union position paper which

we first published in 1974. The first part focuses on the origins of the trade unions, their basic role in capitalist society, and the relationship between the unions, the party, and the future organs of proletarian state power — in other words, the fundamental underpinnings of the trade union question.

The second part deals with communist strategy and tactics within the trade unions and outlines the elements of a class struggle program. The paper, particularly Part I, reflects our concerns of several years ago, some of which are no longer so urgent. We consciously directed much of our thrust against syndicalist and dual unionist ideas which had more currency then than now. Nevertheless, we are publishing the paper without changes because we think its overall analysis remains of central importance. Furthermore while the more vulgar forms of syndicalism have receded in their influence, these ideas continue to exercise considerable sway in a more sophisticated guise.

We have added two speeches from a trade union conference held in November 1976 under the auspices of the PWOC. The first speech deals with united front tactics and represents an important elaboration of our understanding of communist work in the unions. It reflects the lessons of both our study and practical work since the publication of the original trade union position paper. We think it will help comrades concretize the meaning of the strategy and tactics section of the paper.

The second speech deals with the relationship of party-building and work in the trade unions. Many readers of the original trade union position paper identified the absence of such a treatment. We hope the inclusion of this speech will fill the gap.

We had intended to include some material drawn from our practical work in the rank and file movement that would further concretize our perspective and aid comrades in caucus-building work. However, the need to keep this pamphlet reasonably priced forced us to revise our plan. We hope to publish some of this material in the future. We welcome any criticisms or comments on these documents, and any suggestions for future publications.

—November, 1977