

873 Broadway
2nd floor south
New York, N.Y. 10003
March 10, 1970

TO NC MEMBERS & ORGANIZERS

Dear Comrades,

The attached is being sent for the information of NC members and organizers only, and is not for general membership distribution.

Comradely,

Jack Barnes (nl)

Jack Barnes
Organization Secretary

873 Broadway
2nd floor south
New York, N.Y. 10003

March 10, 1970

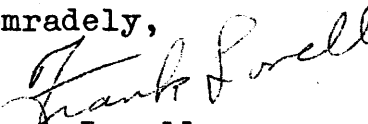
TO NC MEMBERS AND ORGANIZERS

Dear Comrades,

The enclosed three letters by Tom Cagle were written to explain the circumstances of his writing the articles which appeared as "Life in an Auto Plant"; his reaction to union bureaucrats expressing public concern about pollution (see letters column, The Militant, Vol. 34, No. 9); and to direct attention to the basic, current question, "Are unions static?", i.e., what kind of institutions have the unions become and how will they be transformed. My letter was a response to Comrade Cagle.

We are sending these along for your information. The Militant in the near future hopes to publish sections of these letters, and will try to carry more articles on the basic question raised here.

Comradely,



Frank Lovell

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2828 Eastman Ave.
Oakland, Calif. 94619
February 11, 1970

Harry Ring, editor
The Militant
873 Broadway
New York, N.Y. 10003

Dear Harry,

I would like to express my appreciation for the good coverage you provided on my series of articles on "Life in an Auto Plant."

It allowed us the opportunity to step up our activity in this plant by waking up the interest of our older readers of The Militant (approx. 20) plus introducing our press to new readers with much more enthusiasm.

How I come to write this article contains a little humor and shows how sometimes little unrelated events can provide real opportunities for our press and recruitment.

We had a gripe session during our lunch break, of approx. 12 workers from my motor line and Frame & Axle during our strike crisis in which I suggested that we corner the shop committee in the union work center and request that they attempt to get our story of speedup out to the press as a propaganda tactic to embarrass G.M. I spoke for our group on this idea, which the chairman of the shop committee played down, by stating that the commercial press would not touch it. (He was probably right.)

By now interest had built up, among my supporters, so I suggested that I write the article, get their approval on it and attempt to get it published, in any of the mass media that would handle it, including the underground and radical press. They all agreed. I wrote it, got their approval and of course you know that the only press in the country that would print our story was The Militant. (That was a foregone conclusion.)

Workers who I would never have tried to sell our Militant to because of their political backwardness were now eagerly awaiting the next installment of the paper because they were carrying "our" story. Some of these copies were read by as many as 15 workers per single copy. We were able to sell an additional 25 copies inside with our young Hayward comrades selling out their bundle of 40 at the plant entrance.

We can think in modest terms of recruitment now, something that did not exist before. Two young contacts have real exciting potential: , Oriental, SDS background, receptive to our

ideas, and _____, product of the Berkeley student radicalization, again SDS background. I was surprised to discover that he was studying Trotsky on his own. I made this remark to Bitsy and the name rang a bell -- he had signed our YSA mailing list in the bookstore checking off also that he wanted to join the YSA.

Both of these kids were transferred onto the night shift and have not established their 90 days yet. All I could do is give them advice and hold my breath. I warned them that they must be immaculate in their habits -- don't do or say anything political, absolutely not to miss one day or even be late one minute, smile at the boss and work like hell. _____ has two weeks to go (a very dangerous time), and _____ has about four weeks.

We have been meeting with these contacts _____, _____ in-between shift change, keeping them informed of our caucus activities.

We are going to mount a campaign around running a slate of candidates for the election of delegates to the 22nd UAW constitutional convention in April, as well as planning some Militant reader socials _____ to find out how many more good contacts there might be working in the plant.

I have enclosed two articles; one started out to be a letter to the editor. Harry, I must learn brevity all over again. I can't seem to write a short letter or article and on top of that I don't like to write.

I raise three valid questions that I feel are very timely on why the trade union bureaucrats are rushing to jump on the ecology bandwagon.

Would you, Frank or Farrell like to answer them either in or out of The Militant?

Feel free to edit or condense the letter, if you print it, and use my name. The second article flows naturally from the first and is presented to provoke thought and discussion on the trade union question and can be used at your convenience.

Yours, for continued good coverage, I remain

Comradely,
s/Tom Cagle

ARE UNIONS STATIC?

By Tom Cagle

The growing together and integration of trade unions into the institutionalized structure of the capitalist system is complete. Not only are the "leaders" aptly described as "Labor Lieutenants of the capitalist class," but the officers on the local level could be described as the Sergeants, Corporals, and Privates in this monolithically structured chain of command with class collaboration on the order of the day.

If trade unions did not exist, it would be necessary for capitalism to invent them. The corporations in "right to work" states took pains to protect the union shop and dues checkoff as necessary control over their workers and were not so enthused about destroying or crippling the usefulness of these institutions.

Corporate management consciously pursues a policy of cultivating, corrupting and manipulating local unions until now they consider them as extensions of their labor relations departments.

A training ground for future foremen...25% of our supervisory personnel, here at GM Fremont, were recruited from union officers and committeemen, and this includes one ex-International Representative. This is perhaps the biggest contributing factor towards the membership's deep demoralization, distrust and alienation towards "the" union.

A deep, growing suspicion that the union, while acting as a third mediating force, sides in with management more often than the workers in order to protect their soft jobs, special privileges and gain "points" towards becoming foremen.

Management openly interferes in and takes sides in all elections to protect their labor relations setup. Militants who attempt to challenge this corruption find strange things all of a sudden happening to them -- like removal from their jobs, or worse, constant harassment and victimization, with suspensions, until they realize that management has spent too many years developing this system to allow anyone to rock the boat.

The development of trade unionism was, up until approximately 10 years ago, essentially a unity of opposites, the leadership reflecting the interest of the capitalists, and the working class seeking to fight back against capitalist attacks.

The intervening decade has produced what I consider the most significant turning point since the 1930's -- a breaking apart of this unity of opposites, a sharply defined splitting process that is now taking place, and is a very necessary prerequisite for the radicalizing upsurge of the working class.

A sharply defined contradiction now exists in the trade

unions, that is irreconcilable, between a collaborationist policy of this "leadership" and a working class that is prepared to use any means necessary to defend their class interests.

The base of support for the bureaucracy now consists of the privileged strata of older workers who are counting the days until retirement. In other words, they are cut off from any real support and hang suspended in mid-air.

Youth, which now constitutes a majority, grows restive and impatient by these old methods of doing business, and anxious to engage in struggle to defend their class interests.

They are receptive to radical and even revolutionary literature now being sold outside the plants.

As the objective conditions propel the young workers to seek more effective defense methods and the strike battles, which they now face, temper them in the fire of class struggle, it will further lay bare the contradictions of opposites still existing within our working class organizations and will pose for them the immediate task of seizing hold of these unions and transforming them into class weapons against the boss.

When the young workers have developed to this level of awareness or class consciousness, they will quickly dispel the remaining illusions, and lay bare the contradictory unity between capital and labor, a necessary part of the process of breaking the capitalist system itself.

s/ Tom Cagle

Letter to the Editor, The Militant

As a rank & file auto worker, it was with mixed feelings that I viewed The Militant of February 6, with a full front-page picture showing an assorted group of UAW and Steel union officials marching up the steps to an anti-pollution hearing, wearing surgical masks to dramatize their "fight" for stronger pollution control.

The contradictions and hypocrisy of this picture stood out in bold relief as I recall the many class battles we workers have had to fight in the plants against dangerous unhealthy polluted working environment and a union bureaucracy that ties our hands and prevents us from waging an effective fight. This condition is so generalized that it effects all plants in varying degrees.

Here at GM Fremont, workers in the pit, on the main lines almost suffer asphyxiation from car exhaust fumes and spillage of raw gasoline. Many veterans of these battles have suspensions of up to four weeks on their records for defying both the union and company in refusing to work under these unsafe conditions.

The body build-up spot welders must contend with a thick, heavy yellow smoke that hangs in the air... If you breathe this smoke too long, it wrecks your lungs... Headaches, dizziness and nausea are common complaints.

The body build-up welders at Ford Milpitas had all they could take a few months ago -- they shut the plant down in a "wildcat" sitdown strike for one day, over lack of ventilation and union-management stalling on these grievances for over one year. To quote one Ford worker, "management came scurrying out of their holes running like scared rats, sweating for once like the workers have to sweat every day. They brought big fans, little fans, even a chromium plated fan from the high and mighty plant manager's office. The union flunkies with their usual gutlessness, immediately began to arbitrate a sellout.

"After having sat on their asses for a year, they had warned the workers that they would face 'serious consequences' if they walked. 'Leave it to us, we'll take care of it....' They were scared that their privileged soft life might be disturbed if things got out of hand."

The union negotiated a compromised settlement of two weeks suspended layoff for these body builders, with a promise to clear their records if they behaved themselves for a period of time. They were told by their union representatives that management "wanted to fire the instigators, but your union won this victory for you." These same fake union leaders were most anxious to cool the situation by crushing workers' rebelliousness so as not to jeopardize their soft privileged jobs as class conciliators.

My question is this: Why is the trade union bureaucracy so treacherous in their betrayal and sellout of the workers' legitimate fight to clean up their in-plant, polluted environment, yet so willing to piously support militant struggles on the outside, to jump on the ecology bandwagon, for clean air, to lead it with militant sounding hot-air rhetoric? Do they really expect workers to turn out and support them? Or do they expect to capture the radicalized student and antiwar movements and lead them, pied piper style, back into supporting "good liberal democrats" who oppose pollution and the war in Vietnam.

The workers in our plant, who read The Militant, all agree that the prominent, favorable display of these trade union picards on the front page of The Militant subtracted from the effectiveness of that issue of our paper and that Marcia Sweetenham should have been given this honor, with the picture of these picards reduced to postage stamp size and buried on the inside pages.

Whether we struggle for clean air inside or outside the plants only dramatizes the fact that we as Auto or Steel workers, etc., are working in dying industries... Industries that must die, or be radically changed, before it makes our environment unliveable.

Not only must we gain control over what is destroying our environment, but we as workers must gain control over this anarchy of production that brings us to this crisis.

The rationale of a socialized economy assumes even larger immediacy as we witness the mounting crisis and contradictions of the profit system here at home, and its imperialist aspects worldwide.

I again, remain yours, for continued good coverage.

Comradely,
s/Tom Cagle

February 25, 1970

Oakland

Dear Tom,

On February 11, (the same day you wrote to the editor of The Militant re: the picture of labor fakers with masks on the front cover of the paper) I sent you a letter asking how many of the pamphlet you can use. It will sell for 25 cents a copy (you get a 40% reduction) and it should serve you well in the campaign for delegates to the UAW convention... if we can get it to you in time.

We want to know how many copies you will take (1,000 or 3,000) so we will know how big to make the press run. If we can take a press run of 5,000, we get a cheaper price. It costs us more if we run only 3,000. What we do depends upon you.

This should be off the press in two or three weeks, maybe sooner.

Your letter hasn't yet been published in the letters column because we haven't yet worked out how best to handle the piece about the hypocrisy of the labor fakers. They often do contradictory things, revealing their hypocrisy, such as supporting antiwar demonstrations. You would have been surprised to hear them on campus during the GE strike denouncing GE as "the country's biggest war materials producer" just to get the students to demonstrate and support the boycott. When these labor fakers do something that promotes the radical movement, we report it and sometimes we praise them for doing the right thing. It isn't necessary for our purposes always to label them as hypocrites and liars. We nail them when they do the wrong thing, which is most of the time.

Your other article, "Are the Unions Static?" involves some very basic considerations. You know there are some academics (James O'Connor who is out there in your part of the country -- UC at Stanford -- is one of them) who are preaching that unions "by their very nature" are reformist organizations. We don't believe this. It is true that all unions today pursue a reformist policy, but it doesn't follow that they must follow such a policy. This argument is one of the things I want to take up soon...but like a lot of other things, I haven't gotten around to it yet.

Please be patient with us here. When the comrades return from the plenum, they should have some interesting reports.

Comradely,
s/Frank Lovell