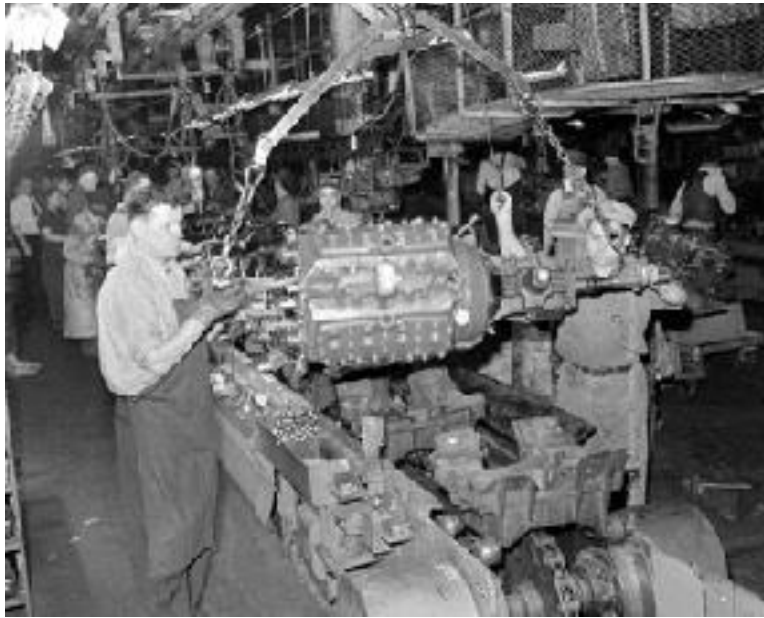


**The Torment and Demise of  
the United Auto Workers Union as Performed by  
the Auto Bosses, the Labor Leaders,  
Counterfeit Radicals, Fictional Revolutionaries, and  
All Those Who Know They Are Not Innocent Either**

**Rich Gibson**



Final Assembly line workers installing engine, Ford Rouge Plant, October 17, 1945

*"... in proportion as capital accumulates, the lot of the laborer,  
be his pay high or low, must grow worse." (Marx, Capital, v1)*

**Where Is Everybody?**

In closed sessions of the United Auto Workers' convention the carefully culled leaders of the UAW's Administration Caucus, the sole party in the UAW's single party state, painstakingly maneuvered through scripted spontaneous demonstrations as one under-boss after another was elected, nearly unanimously, and one program after the next was adopted as the next breakthrough strategy. One of the few dissident delegates who made it inside called the convention "an excruciating performance of untalented vampires doing a ritual dance on the graves of the members." The UAW lost almost one million members in the last 30 years, down now to 598,648,1 and falling fast (down from a 1969

peak of 1,530,870 members) as the union continued to organize a retreat that began in the 1970's, urging thousands of GM and Delphi workers to take retirement buyouts, to save the companies once again.

There were rank and file factory workers in the June, 2006, convention. Elected by other workers, they use the convention as an all-expenses paid vacation. Years earlier the US Supreme Court ruled that it is permissible for the UAW, and other unions, to use a caucus system (loyalty the key to membership) to restrict members from participating in the union. The union, though, legally extracts dues from workers who must pay in order to keep their jobs, check-off, a return for the union leaders' no-strike pledges dating back to World War II. The only sign of dissent was a motion from Gary Walkowitz, who proposed that the union allow retirees to vote on contracts that would cut their pay or benefits. The motion never got enough support to reach the floor.[2](#)

Those UAW members who remain at work are under a continued assault from Fords (it is always, "Fords," not, "Ford"), General Motors, and Chrysler, a frontal attack the UAW leadership never countered. Concession followed concession on the promise from the union and the companies that concessions would save jobs. Concessions never saved jobs. The endless retreats only made the companies hungry for more. UAW members who have been laid off in that period have vanished from the public eye, but they will never regain the economic benefits they once had.

Labor Day was once a big deal in Detroit. Tens of thousands of union members would march down Woodward Avenue from the Ford Highland Park plant to what became Kennedy Square, singing "Solidarity Forever" (" . . . They have taken untold millions that they never toiled to earn, but without our brains and muscle not a single wheel can turn, we can break their haughty power, win our freedom when we learn, that the union makes us strong. . . .") over and over again. People would picnic along the route, making it a day for the entire community.

On Labor Day 2005, officials of the AFL-CIO and its Detroit spearhead, the UAW, rode in Cadillac, Ford, and Chrysler SUV's provided by the auto companies down Woodward Avenue along a shortened route since the street is now mostly a boarded up ruin, a virtual tunnel of wreckage of industrialism, the Highland Park plant an empty hulk. It was a lonely hollow ride. Virtually no workers showed up to return regal waves from the union officials.

The UAW is not poor. Perhaps that is proof it is not dead. The UAW has money. It draws income from investments and membership dues (and it is a significant property holder as well). In 2005, the UAW made \$51,960,369 from its investments. The UAW holds a strike fund of nearly one billion dollars, \$914, 244, 968.00, to be precise. In twelve separate funds, the union holds \$190,135, 870. And an emergency fund hosts \$87,731,995. There are 524 people on staff, including seven top officers, eleven executive board members, and a host of "international" representatives, all drawing more than \$100,000 per year. Yet the UAW leadership cannot mobilize its own members for strikes or job actions, having abandoned that kind of activity soon after WWII -- and

when UAW members attempted work actions on their own, UAW leaders and staff assaulted them, as we shall see. In the UAW, and the entire labor movement (for our purposes, I adopt the term "labor movement," to mean AFL-CIO, which has little in common with labor or movement), there are very few people who have ever marched on a serious picket line, nearly no one who has ever led a strike, especially not a strike that won.

On June 22, 2006, the *New York Times* national editions, delivered to most subscribers' homes by 5:00 a.m. all over the US (a feat in itself, demonstrating the potential of our era), featured a 32-page distinct color section devoted to "Luxury, the New Gilded Age of Autos." In this section, which offers extravagance in the form of the old stand-by of chrome, metal, and wheels, there are exactly three clearly visible human beings, all men; the only one with a noticeable face being James Giordano, an aging BMW car salesman: "I came to the US 47 years ago in search of the best life quality the world had to offer." Remarkably, the traditional slinky women who once graced car ads with the fantasy that the car would get you one, are not offered. Instead, it is just page after page of Jaguars, Hondas, Lamborghinis, with some declassé Dodge Vipers, GM and Ford SUV's tossed in. No fantasy; no more. Buy the Beast. Rule alone.

On June 26, 2006, GM announced that 33% of its workforce, 35,000 workers, had taken the bait for employment buyouts. Delphi, once a part of GM, spun off as a feeder industry, said 12,600 workers accepted buyouts, about half the work force, with many more expected to follow before a July "deadline." And Ford happily announced that at least 10,000 workers would leave their employ. The three companies announced simultaneous management cuts. GM lost market share in the US, down from what was once 50% of the market, to about 20% and falling. Once the world's largest and most profitable corporation, GM lost more than 10 billion dollars in 2005. GM stocks, which had bottomed out at junk bond status, rebounded with the announcement of the drastic cuts. In 2005 the UAW had loudly threatened to strike Delphi, as it had in 1998, a sham job action that never mobilized the rank and file of the union, and which resulted in the final spin off of Delphi from GM. Early in 2006, though, the union leadership had notified the workers to expect concessions in a contract due to be negotiated in 2007. The following day, Delphi announced that it would hire temporary workers, paid at less than 50% of what UAW members make, with no benefits, to replace the exiting workers. The new employees would be required to pay UAW dues.<sup>3</sup> Overproduction, however, played a role. Chrysler had a 108-day oversupply of 2005 and 06 vehicles and planned a massive sales promotion through August.

No people. No workers in the UAW convention. Hardly anyone left in US auto plants. No workers in the Labor Day parade. Not even a strumpet in the auto ads. Whither the people? Where are the jobs and quality of life that once made it possible for a single worker to support a family, within what was usually a 40-hour week? Or was it all a myth?

Blame Henry Ford and the UAW. Blame a social system that diminishes every aspect of everything it touches: capitalism. Blame the dogmatic subordinated left, the

Communist Party (CPUSA), in particular. Most of all, blame the UAW leaders. Let us not be too forgiving of our ancestors or ourselves either. But how shall we analyze the UAW, as the epitome of US unionism, and, above all, what shall we, who see ourselves as workers too, do?

### Fords

Start with Ford. Unions mirror the companies, industries, where their members are. They pick up the language, the calendars, and much of their character from their employers. The following explanation allows us to understand the social relations required by the system of capital. These alienated, exploitive relations then help explain the condition of the UAW, the CPUSA, (which had so much to do with birthing the UAW), and the vampire dance of unionism in the US today.

Both Henry Ford and the UAW were popular once, Ford being "helpful to labor," and the UAW being *for* labor. And, indeed, Ford has much of Detroit named after him, from freeways to buildings. But Ford's popularity was discredited by reality: his use of Frederick Winslow Taylor's systems of scientific management drove workers relentlessly on speeding assembly lines and fulfilled the dream of every boss -- the mind of the worker was replaced by the mind of the employer. Skilled labor was superseded by repetitive monotony and legions of supervisors, time and motion specialists, foremen. Once the workers are mere conduits for the demands of machines, they need a lot of watching.<sup>4</sup>

Ford and Taylor were not, at first glance, evil overlords. They both believed that within the confines of capitalism, everyone was in the same boat and all could gain from all. Both were born in the Progressive Era. The notion prevailed that an industrial utopia could be achieved, with each worker in their deserved position, and through the regimentation of work. While some would work, others would watch, and a few would rule, the ethic of all for all could be achieved, since Ford and Taylor both believed that everyone in the nation (or in Ford's plant) had common interests. The task at hand was to boost production. Sharing would come later (Lenin, in nearly the same period, believed in Taylorism as well, making it a benchmark of Bolshevik socialism, that is, capitalism with a purportedly benevolent party at the head -- sharing for later).

Ford was a great assembler of things. Some of those things were people who, in turn, learned about organizing things from Henry Ford. Robert McNamara, one of the architects of the failed US war on Vietnam, was a "Ford Whiz Kid," one of several bright young white men mentored by Ford. Ford assembled things on whims: farms (at one point every Ford employee was required to eat Ford's soybeans, which he believed would solve world hunger), schools (fascinating places where what is today called constructivist teaching, interactive education, was used to serve Fordist needs), offices (his legendary method of firing executives was to have a crew cause the offender's office to just vanish within other offices, the unwitting boss arriving to see he had no door to enter) and Peace tours (Ford thought a peace trip he sponsored could stop WWI). Little was outside his ego, but the people themselves.

Henry Ford took the idea for the assembly line from the pharmaceutical industry, well established in Detroit when he started business. His Highland Park plant, once the beacon of innovation for industrial capitalism, then combined Taylor's theories with the close surveillance of every movement of daily work life, reducing each movement to its most simple foundation, making workers extensions of the machines. Indeed, in one experiment, Taylor joined Ford in making a film. Lights were attached to a worker's hands and the camera traced the lights. All that was left on the film was the motion of light. The worker disappeared.

Ford believed his industrial utopia, rooted in his factories, had to encompass every aspect of a worker's life, and everyone's political life as well. Ford owned Dearborn, home to his immense Rouge Plant, and nearby Inkster, as well. Dearborn was segregated into the 1970's. For decades, it was illegal to circulate union material in the city limits.

Ford intended to forge the industrial worker as well as the machine and its processes, one feeding the other. Ford's Sociological Department (which set the tone for most of social work), investigated each worker to ensure thrift, devotion to family, monogamy, fear of promiscuity, reliance on official approval for the activities of daily life, abstinence from alcohol (and fun), and church attendance. The Sociological Department, though, devolved into the Educational Department, a company spy racket that sought to eliminate radicals, communists, anarchists of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) from any Ford work place. And that then became attached to a goon squad made up of parolees from Jackson Prison, designated to attack union organizers, led by a thug, Harry Bennett, who drove around Detroit with lions in his back seat. Industrial utopias which require the automation of work life, faster lines, longer hours, lower wages, that is, profits, mean that the Ford Family is an abusive one.

Ford and US auto companies have long proclaimed their paternalism toward their workers (and the UAW reveled in it). The reality is that any pretense of altruism in the US plants ended with WWI. Thereafter, political attacks on radicals, wage cuts (the five-dollar day was a myth; it was a profit sharing plan, and the bulk of the five dollars was doled out as "sharing" only if the worker met production and morality quotas), devastating industrial injuries covered up by company doctors, job insecurity, and speed-ups, all typified auto work from 1917 on.

Still, Ford for years insisted on the notion of the American melting pot -- the idea of industrial and national unity arching over all social problems. Indeed, he actually ordered immigrant employees who had completed a training period, and attained citizenship, to stand in a real giant melting pot and get stirred by giant spoons; then dance out of the pot waving American flags; a favorite among Ford's spectacles.[5](#)

The melting pot melted down in most instances. Ford hated Jews. He caused the publication of the "International Jew," a series of articles probably ghost-written for Ford that was published in his *Dearborn Independent* newspaper. Beginning in May, 1920, the serialized articles ran for 91 consecutive editions. Relying heavily on the forged fallacious "Protocols of the Elders of Zion," the "International Jew," spread throughout

the world, frequently circulated by Christians and Klansmen, both enjoying a revival in the period. Hitler admired Ford, and vice-versa. When he was sued, Ford retreated from his open anti-semitism, but there is no evidence that he abandoned it. In 1997, the Ford Motor Company, directed by a great-grandson, Henry, sponsored the showing of "Schindler's List," without commercials, on NBC, presumably the final regrets. The film, however, offers solutions that the first Henry would have approved: religion, anti-communism, and more capitalism; key props for recreating the origins of fascism.[6](#)

Ford hated black people, assigning them to the worst jobs in the plants, the paint shop and the iron foundry, for example, and although he was something of an affirmative-action employer of the time, he kept his workforce carefully segregated by nationality, language, and especially race. Ford believed women should not work, and when they did, they should do women's work. For years, Ford's goon squads enforced a code of silence in the plants. Workers were told not to talk, or else.

Ford intuitively used most of the common tactics of the Masters in their struggles with Slaves. Hierarchies were promoted among the workers, beyond race and language, to pay rates, pay for performance plans, driving low level managers with just-on-time materials and delivery schemes (later declared a Japanese invention when the US auto industry sank against Asia). Force and violence stood behind any reward, any paycheck, as workers faced horrific conditions when jobless.

Above all, he constantly echoed what any Master would consider the highest achievement of dominance: instilling the firm belief in the oppressed that the relationship of ruler and ruled does not exist. Exploitation is freedom. Master and Slave are at one with each other, sharing the same goals.

All the themes are there inside Fords: the corporate-state notion of the company and its work force united in the national interest, racism, demands for productivity, anti-communism and anti-semitism, sexism, silencing, a relentless assault on the work force to guarantee domination in the work place and often in the community, concentration on things over people, especially the biggest thing, profits won from exploited labor and raw materials. Ford created his own market with the cheap, standardized, Model T, available in "any color so long as it is black."

**"As Long As Work Sucks, People Will Fight Back."  
Resistance or Revolution?[7](#)**

Even the early benevolent Ford met opposition from the work force. Turnover was always high during periods when other jobs could be had. Absenteeism was rampant. Auto work, at first, was a seasonal job. People came and went, making not only production, but organizing, difficult. Slowdowns, walkouts, and industrial sabotage began quickly in his plants, and really never ended, since work continued to suck.

But Ford, with GM, Chrysler, American Motors, and other US auto interests went on to pave the western world, marching out from Detroit. They drew raw materials from

nearby, iron from Michigan's Upper Peninsula, coal from Pennsylvania, rubber from Brazil; and a work force from all over the world, most of them driven out of their homelands because of oppressive conditions there, desperate immigrants hungry for a new life, a new political system, jobs and justice.

Workers in auto plants began to organize themselves around common problems early on. The United Automobile, Aircraft, and Vehicle Workers began organizing in the Fisher plant and led a strike in 1921. Built along industrial lines (distinct from the American Federation of Labor, which organized skilled tradesmen on the basis of their work, that is, each carpenter in one union, each plumber in another, etc., an employers' dream), the UAAVW collapsed early on.

In the mid-twenties the Auto Workers Union, a small upstart led by the Communist Party, organized minor strikes, produced shop papers, and went defunct.

The AFL made a quick gesture at organizing in 1926. William Green, the AFL president, sought to organize the auto workers through the auto bosses, with their permission, along craft lines. He found that neither the bosses nor the workers were interested. As in all of its history, the leadership of the AFL played a reactionary role in organizing auto workers, seeking to sabotage every major strike in the history of the labor movement.<sup>9</sup>

In 1933, four years into the depression, a series of sporadic struggles broke out in the auto industry: On January 13 the Briggs plant went on strike; Motor Products followed on January 20 (led by women), Hayes in Grand Rapids on January 21, The Briggs "tie-up" on January 23 and 24, Hudson Motors on February 1, Willis-Overland in Toledo on February 26, and Fisher on March 31. In the spring, workers at Chevrolet in Oakland, California went on strike, followed by White Motors in Cleveland.

These outbreaks were led by the remnants of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), the Communist Party, and several occupation-based groups outside the AFL, like the militant Mechanics Educational Society of America, which repeatedly allied itself with industrial unionism but, in the case of the Toledo strike, the mechanics scabbed--indicating the instability of the independent associations.<sup>10</sup>

When the AFL did probe the auto industry, workers rejected them as sharply as employers. Many workers had no use for unions in general; others turned to form independent unions to solve local problems. Later, though, the AFL would swing into action with a well-funded and staffed campaign to isolate battles for industrial unionism and, especially, to smash radical or revolutionary activity in the plants.<sup>11</sup>

The struggle to organize the auto industry at this point is illustrative of the main approaches workers in the US used .to organize -- and how they have been led, or misled.

## The Structures of Unionism in the U.S.A.

*"I can get one-half the working class to kill the other half."* (Jay Gould, railroader)

The Industrial Workers of the World sought to organize all workers into "The One Big Union" no matter their craft, industry, skill, race, or sex. The IWW drew leaders from an international mix, men and women of all races. They saw the source of workers' power as control of the work place, the ability to shut down production and to use that stoppage to transform the entire society, for revolution, "to abolish the wage system." Their vision of their social context was clear: "The working class and the employing class have nothing in common." They structured their organization along lines of horizontal decision-making, with the crux of the thing being that those who went out and raised hell were leaders. Their tactics were clear as well; direct on the job action, opposition to the "electoral circus," where voters "choose which millionaire will oppress them every few years." They were the pinnacle of anarcho-syndicalism. And they hated the "labor fakers" of the AFL.[12](#)

The American Federation of Labor was, as we have seen, organized along craft lines, and the crafts were overwhelmingly white-only and male. Craft unionism could easily mean that a dozen competing unions would represent workers in a single company -- an employer's dream that is lived today in the airline industry, to take just one.

The AFL believed that the interests of their white skilled craftsmen members were more identical to US employers than not. In the AFL leadership's view, it was in their interest to support US capitalism in the competition with other nations. Hence, from the outset, the AFL supported US imperialism's adventures into other countries, the destruction of indigenous trade unions outside the US (replacing radical unions with puppet unions, often trained by the AFL). The AFL not only supported the destruction of radical unions outside the US, they joined with US government officials and capitalists to identify and destroy leftist labor organizations inside the country, like the IWW, the Communist Party, and other radical and revolutionary groups.

In brief, the AFL always believed that the key to better lives for their members was to keep others out of their crafts, to segregate rather than build solidarity. Even today, most key leaders in the AFL unions are white and male. The most common AFL tactic was to seek alliances with employers and politicians to promote their members' needs, although they did recognize and use craft-based job actions. Clearly, though, the viewpoint of the AFL was not class struggle, but *craft* struggle, and collaboration, cooperation, and support for US capitalism. The links between the AFL and US imperialism are important to underline at this juncture, as they form the practical side of a discussion soon to follow.[13](#)

The Congress of Industrial Organizations, drawn together in response to the growing uprisings of the early thirties, represented a third distinct approach to worker organizing. The CIO was reformist, not opposed to capitalism, but opposed to the method of AFL organizing and the virtual absence of on-the-job struggle that the AFL represented. At



least in part, the CIO simply trailed behind the shifts in the methods of production in the US in that era, from craft-based jobs to unskilled industrial labor. Like nearly the whole history of the US labor movement, the CIO divided workers as much as uniting them. The CIO sought to organize workers by industry, not one big union, not by craft but all the rubber workers in one union, all the auto workers in another union, all the steelworkers in another, etc.

The CIO was founded by an unprincipled alliance of the reactionary John L. Lewis of the United Mineworkers (who, in a 1935 AFL convention, slugged an AFL leader and led a walkout) and the Communist Party which, by then, had adopted a position of organizing militant industrial unions for reform and respectability.

The CIO was inconsistent on the struggle against racism and sexism (though the communist members, for the most part, were the key players in the fight against racism in workplaces and communities), though they were far more egalitarian than their AFL counterparts. The presence of radicals, socialists, and communists (CP, Trotskyists, Socialist Party, etc.) as well as a mainly spontaneous outburst of strikes, sit-downs, mass pickets uniting immigrant and second-generation workers in industrial work places meant that the CIO focused, initially, on job actions, but CIO leaders, including the communists, quickly abandoned that posture.

The CIO never saw on-the-job action as a principle, as did the IWW, rather one tactic among many in the battle for reform, including voting and participation in political processes. In fact, rather than initiate the massive job actions of the thirties, the CIO leadership (and CP) just stepped into the lead of it, deflected it, and took charge. Indeed, the CIO and CPUSA quickly surrendered jobs actions in favor of an association with the auto bosses and government. To corral the rank and file, the CPUSA and CIO leadership encouraged the adoption of undemocratic vertical decision-making structures (not unlike the authoritarian nature of the top-down CPUSA itself) that eventually bit them, when they were run off from the CIO.<sup>14</sup>

### **Commies: The UAW and the Left**

*"It was ingrained in my character that if the party asked something of us, we responded obediently. They said 'Jump' and we said 'How high?'"* Markus Wolf, former director of the East German Ministry of State Security, or Stasi

Leadership, if that is the word, of the Communist Party (CP) members, Trotskyists, democratic socialists (militant liberals), pacifists, and anarchists was key to the CIO. Overall the CPUSA was key to the UAW. Anarchists, members of the Socialist Party, and Trotskyists, played a part, but the central role was the CP's, though many of their early leaders, like Big Bill Haywood, paid their initial dues in the IWW or the unions that flowed into it in the early 1900s: Haywood's Western Federation of Miners. Trotskyists still play a role inside the UAW today, in the form of Solidarity, Labor Notes, and the International Socialists. But it was the CPUSA that was pivotal to the CIO and the UAW. The IWW may have known the tactics, like mass picketing, solidarity, creative action on

the job, but the CPUSA understood the necessity of conspiratorial work in facing down industrial giants like Ford and GM.

There has been a raucous battle among labor historians, cultural historians, social historians, and others, about the nature of the CP. Was it -- as was charged from the right, some anarchists, and the Trotskyists -- a mere tool of Soviet social imperialism? Or was it, while clearly taking direction from the USSR, really more of a rank-and-file oriented mass social movement that involved hundreds of thousands of Americans in battles for unionism, for collective bargaining, the shorter work week, against child labor, for social security, and wage protections -- and which at the same time made unforgettable cultural contributions like the classic film, *Salt of the Earth*?<sup>15</sup> Did the members of the Comintern, including the CPUSA, follow Stalin and the Soviets out of respect for their leadership in making the first socialist revolution, because they were paid off, or because they were just too imbued with voluntary servitude?

My own view falls nearby the work of Theodore Draper, who believed that the CPUSA was, mainly, a tool of the national interest of the USSR. However, Draper would sharply disagree with my belief that the USSR was never anything but a capitalist nation with a falsely benevolent party serving as its ruling class, a nation that soon developed its own imperial designs. This is not to negate the civilizing contributions of the CPUSA, but it is to say that most of the best things the CPUSA did were accomplished when members ignored the directions of their party leaders and did what their own, on-the-ground, analysis told them to do. Rank-and-file organizing in the south in the thirties, for example, was carried on successfully in spite of, not because of, direction from the party center.<sup>16</sup>

In any case, there is abundant evidence that the CPUSA was operating on terrain established by the Soviets, i.e., for the most part they did what the Soviets told them to do -- even though at the same time many militant rank and file people made enormous sacrifices to win gains on the behalf of the US working class. They were mediocre reformers, not revolutionaries, not reds themselves. A real reformer would want to create a mass base of people who understood the strategies and tactics used to win reforms, so the base could defend them. The CPUSA was weak on that, too centralized, longing for approval from the powerful in order to build the USSR.

The core communist, Marxist, idea of revolution, taken seriously, was rarely raised. Working with a sheen of radicalism, and plenty of militancy from time to time, at base the CPUSA operated much like the people habituated by a life of wage work, subordinated within family life, surrounded by mysticism and pain, the people the reds claimed they would make class conscious -- in a devoted search for someone else to tell them what to do. Take several examples of the twisted maneuvers, the contorted changes in line, that any long-term CPUSA member would have had to support and struggled for, patiently explained to other people, got arrested for, careers ruined for, in a few cases, died for:

- The open declaration of the New Economic Policy in 1921, which announced a return to capitalism in the USSR, under the guidance of the party, and the related reliance on subordination and technology in work places -- openly capitalist relations of work never hidden but taken as a Soviet ethic;
- The establishment of socialism-in-one-country, and the attendant nationalism it produced;
- The preposterous idea, originating in the USSR, that a Negro Nation existed within the US, and that the CPUSA should fight for its secession, the establishment of a new nation in an area of the south;
- The 1938 declaration that class struggle had ended in the USSR, as socialism had reached its highest stage, and henceforward there would be no discussion about class struggle in the newly announced classless nation which coincided with:
- Stalin's 1938 eradication of the "negation of the negation," in Soviet philosophy, that is, the idea that things continue to change, endlessly, at odds with the end of class struggle;
- The abundantly obvious reality of the lifestyles of party leaders in the USSR, far away from anything that might be thought of as an ethic of communism -- and the lifestyles of technicians, scientists, and the new class in power under what must be seen, now, as the failure of socialist equality in all realms;
- The cult of personality around Stalin and some CPUSA leaders like William Z. Foster;
- Relentless attacks on honest radicals inside the USSR and the CPUSA, like Louis Fraina, or, on the other continent, ALL of the old Bolsheviks inside the CPSU, destroying the concept of democratic centralism, eradicating all but the centralism;
- The shift from the successful "third period," in the twenties and early thirties when the CPUSA viewed fascism as a logical and necessary working out of capital's processes and, therefore, attacked liberals and political leaders like Roosevelt as "social fascists," who mislead and disarm workers, to the 1935 shift of line originating from the Stalinist controlled Comintern -- the Popular Front, which identified fascism as a fluke, bad people of the ruling class seizing power (Dimitroff) and, hence, calling for alliances with liberals, like Roosevelt, which drove working-class people out of the CP, and middle-class people into it;[17](#)
- The sudden shift from opposing all imperialist wars and fascism to favoring the Hitler-Stalin pact, yet witnessing the nature of the pact as, clearly, an identity of interests (not Stalin stalling for time, but Stalin and Hitler making a common deal) when Poland was divided, and Finland invaded -- and Stalin directed the dismantling

of his anti-German intelligence network;

- The switch from support for the Hitler-Stalin pact to, "All out to save the Soviet Motherland" (sic), when the once-militant CPUSA took the lead in demanding and enforcing no-strike pledges in US auto plants (which ran full steam in Germany, working for the Nazis, as did Ford-owned plants);
- The CPUSA supported the internment of Japanese-Americans in the internment camps, that is, concentration camps, during WWII, following the logic of patriotism and support for the US-Soviet alliance, such as it was;
- The CPUSA declaration that socialism is 20th-century Americanism and the next step, the dissolution of the party by Earl Browder, as there was no need for it in modern America;
- The mechanical belief (and practice) that battles for economic demands (wages, hours, but not much on working conditions) in unions are inherently demands that lead to dramatic social change, coupled with the vast "secret underground" network of the CPUSA, so infiltrated by police agents that the people who needed to know about the CPUSA could not be told, to salvage secrecy, while the people who did not need to know, cops, knew the whole story -- and the rightward turns of the secret wing, paralleling similar underground efforts all over the world, combining the twin forces of opportunism and sectarianism and quite neatly;
- The reestablishment of the CPUSA, which soon became a militant leafleting operation within the Democratic Party, urging ties with top labor bosses, who hated the CP;
- The abandonment of that underclass of workers who were not in the organized sphere of the AFL-CIO during and after WWII, especially workers in the south, black and immigrant workers, reinforcing the Achilles' heel of all labor movements: racism and nationalism;
- The unremitting denials that the CPUSA was on the payroll of the USSR, the insistence that the Rosenbergs were not guilty, the glorification of the reformist past of the CPUSA with no critical reflection of its grotesque failures, or the ruin of its Motherland when the CPUSA was indeed on the payroll of the USSR. The reforms of the past were all, predictably, taken away, and the social fascist Soviet Motherland collapsed of its own inertia (and a shove from the CIA in Afghanistan) to become an unprecedented form of capitalism in decay, suffering war-time death rates, a rapidly declining population, the rise of religious irrationalism, etc. [18](#)

What kind of class-conscious communist rebel would dance through that, and still be faithful? Many did, though many quit.

Every shift in CPUSA policy spilled directly into the heart of American trade unionism, especially the UAW. CPUSA policy drew from the well of the socialism-in-one-country nationalism of the USSR. It would be hard for the CPUSA to explain, for example, a battle for control over the processes of work in US factories when the life blood of work in the USSR was the rushing line of a Taylorist factory -- all for the national interest.

### **What Is To Be Known?**

*"Both for the production on a mass scale of this communist consciousness, and for the success of the cause itself, the alteration of men on a mass scale is, necessary, an alteration which can only take place in a practical movement, a revolution; this revolution is necessary, therefore, not only because the ruling class cannot be overthrown in any other way, but also because the class overthrowing it can only in a revolution succeed in ridding itself of all the muck of ages and become fitted to found society anew." (Marx, *The German Ideology*)*

One expects more from communists (or, seen from the right, much less). While there has been no clearly enunciated communist ethic, it is not hard to see that the CPUSA and egalitarianism, democracy, solidarity, internationalism, anti-racism, anti-sexism, the unleashing of creativity and mutual care, the complete transformation of work and communal life including family life and aesthetics, only stood together in the most temporary of opportune alliances. At the very least, one would expect opposition to capitalism, an earnest desire to end, not ameliorate, the processes of exploitation, to halt racist, nationalist, and sexist alienation, to demonstrate the reification as the rule of things (like autos) as distinct from promoting auto sales, an analysis of the government, the state, as a weapon of the rich, not a potential ally, and the mention of revolution, if not a forthright plan. None of that was forthcoming from the CPUSA.

What the CPUSA (trailing Stalin) did, in practice, was pursue the path Lenin cursed, "official optimism . . . which serves to conceal opportunism," coming from two directions: (1) the belief that the continuing development of productive forces coupled with purely economic struggles of the working class (in George Meany's words, "More") would lead to, not just socialism, but a profound, class conscious, understanding of capitalism, and (2) that alliances with the bourgeoisie and its allies, like top labor leaders, would equally lead to close ties with the working class, socialism, and socialist understanding.[19](#)

At the core, the issue must be: what is it that masses of people need to know, and how do we need to come to know it, in order to lead reasonably connected, free, equitable, democratic lives within communities dedicated to opposition to selfishness, exploitation of others, irrationalism; caring communities of self-actualizing people? And, moreover, how do we get from what is, our current conditions, to what ought to be, when one must be drawn from the other? Every leaflet, every demonstration, every strike, should address the roots of this question which is, after all, one of the issues that shipwrecked socialism - the willingness of masses of people to accept a new boss, after making huge sacrifices

to get rid of the old one. Each action of the left should be tested against its impact on class consciousness.

There is nothing magical in daily life or even the resistance that workers must mount to survive that reveals the role of class rule in society, or what to do about it. The deepest failure of socialism, the failure to forge a mass of class conscious people who could defend what they had won, demonstrates this point rather clearly.

Lenin (who the CPUSA and Stalin cited all the time -- indeed Stalin had him stuffed) thought of class consciousness in this way:

Working class consciousness cannot be genuine political consciousness unless the workers are trained to respond to *all* cases of tyranny, oppression, violence, and abuse, no matter *what class* is affected -- unless they are trained, moreover, to respond from a Social Democratic [i.e., revolutionary communist] point of view and no other. The consciousness of the working class cannot be genuine class consciousness unless the workers learn, from concrete, and above all from topical political facts and events to observe *every* other social class in *all* the manifestations of its intellectual, ethical and political life; unless they learn to apply in practice the materialist estimate of *all* aspects of the life and activity of *all* classes, strata, and groups of the population. Those who concentrate the attention, observation, and consciousness of the working class exclusively, or even mainly, upon itself alone are not Social Democrats; for the self-knowledge of the working class is indissolubly bound up, not solely with a fully clear theoretical understanding -- it would be even truer to say, not so much with the theoretical, as with the practical understanding -- of the relationships between *all* the various classes of modern society, acquired through the experience of political life. For this reason the conception of economic struggle as the most widely applicable means of drawing the masses into the political movement, which our Economists preach, is so extremely harmful and reactionary in its practical significance.[20](#)

Class consciousness is the awareness that one is "part of a social group that, through common work activity at the same time reproduces a social system and others in it who do not have the same interests regarding that system, and who do not participate in it in the same manner . . . it is an orientation toward political action . . . an awareness of others, of those who are similar and those who are different with regard to their long-term interests, and an awareness of the social structure that makes their differences real."[21](#)

Class consciousness implies anti-racism, anti-capitalism, as well as a vision of a better future against which today's actions can be examined. This is not to simply reduce every question of race, sex, religion, or ethnicity immediately to greed, profits, but it is to say that the war for surplus value has, at the end of the day, decisive influence in setting up all the social relations of capital.

Capital's schools, racism, nationalism, sexism, the unionism that the UAW exemplifies, and religion all disguise social problems, problems of class, as problems of individual people, competing races/crafts/industries/nations, or fate. That is, capital's schools and UAW forms of unionism are designed, above all, to create a veneer of limited knowledge, but to wipe out class consciousness. To date, this is succeeding.

Class consciousness has been seen as:

- (1) a logical and necessary result of the advance of productive forces, that is, when the world is industrialized, people will become class conscious (Kautsky, Stalin);
- (2) an awareness of the whole picture of capital, through the daily bitter experiences that capital must offer the working class -- and the intervention of an advanced party (Lukacs);
- (3) an offering to working people from organized intellectuals and dedicated activists, especially as crises arise (Lenin);
- (4) workers' spontaneous response to their collective, persistent problems, as work is always alienating (Glberman); and
- (5) the natural product of intellectuals produced by the working class itself, organic intellectuals, whose ideas can be more easily accepted, grasped (Gramsci).

None of these formulas has worked well. Class consciousness, then, is a pedagogical and practical problem that has not been resolved, that plagues the working classes of the world as crises of capital -- inequality, imperialist war, rising irrationalism, international bankruptcies, militarism, etc. -- make the current situation especially menacing, urgent.

The crux of the pedagogical issue goes beyond transcending racist alienation and defeating exploitation. At the heart of the question is the view that people can overcome the Master/Slave relationship, consciously, yet not recreate it at a new level; to forge a new society, a caring community, from the wreckage of the old, to forge reason from unreason.

This was not the project the CPUSA and the UAW took up. What did they in fact do?

### **What Was Done?**

*"The economic basis of 'social-chauvinism' . . . and of opportunism is the same, namely, an alliance between an insignificant section at the 'top' of the labour movement, and its 'own' national bourgeoisie, directed against the masses of the proletariat, an alliance between the servants of the bourgeoisie and the bourgeoisie, directed against the class that is exploited by the bourgeoisie. Social-chauvinism is a consummated opportunism." (Lenin,*

"Opportunism, and the Collapse of the Second International")[22](#)

Recognizing that employers only occasionally reconciled themselves to unions, it remains that the UAW and employers, early on, joined in the corporate state that Henry Ford envisioned long ago, the unity of government and business leaders with union operatives all in the national interest. In 1940, Walter Reuther, along with other leaders of the CIO, proposed to Roosevelt that a deeper relationship of the union leadership, business chieftains, and government officials could offer greater control over radicals or subversives among the workers.[23](#)

Perhaps an interlude of two stories will help in introducing the betrayals of the UAW leaders.

Born in a UAW town, Detroit; raised in a school system where teachers openly supported the UAW and promoted songs like "Solidarity Forever"; having worked in UAW auto industry feeder plants, and Fords' Rouge Plant as well, I have many memories of the UAW. Two stand out. One is being present before dawn in August, 1973, on a steamy street outside the Chrysler Mack Avenue sit-down strike. Led by the grandson of one of the founders of time and motion studies (Frank Gilbreth was also featured in the original "Cheaper by the Dozen," movie; his family ran its life on Taylor's time and motion system), grandson Bill Gilbreth and Clint Smith led workers in the plant who had seized their workplace, a la Flint, 1937, and were holding out for promises to guarantee their health and safety on the job. The plant was notorious for workplace accidents, arms and fingers lost, for speedup, and for brutal racist foremen driving a mostly black workforce. As was once the habit in Detroit, local activists had set up a protective cordon, and informational picket line, around the gate to the plant.

Shortly before sunrise, busses began to arrive. From the busses emerged large men obviously armed with baseball bats, iron pipes, brass knuckles, nunchuks. On the outside, picketers were initially please to see reinforcements, until we were attacked by the UAW goon squad, beaten to the ground, and told to disappear. The UAW staff then entered the plant, with the police, and began an assault that lasted more than an hour, eventually driving the militant UAW members out, turning them over to the police.[24](#)

My second memory is UAW vice-president Marc Stepp, an older black man once charged with Chrysler bargaining, photographed by himself, holding a lone hubcap in the area that was once an immense Chrysler plant. Stepp stood in a huge vacant lot littered with the chunks and pieces of the demolished plant, peering at the hubcap, asking, "What happened?" Stepp had played a leading role in abolishing the thought of strikes as a UAW weapon, had taken a leadership role in convincing members that concessions would save their jobs, and had attacked the black leadership of the Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement (Drum) for disappointing purportedly progressive UAW leaders.[25](#)

Stepp, however, was no Walter Reuther. Reuther had been, briefly, a skilled tradesman, a tool and die worker -- lost a toe when a die fell on him in a plant. He was a member of the Socialist Party for five years in the early thirties, but his socialism was



offset by his quick promotion to foreman. His Socialist background was eliminated in official biographies. Never a rank-and-file union member, he was placed on the executive board of the UAW when other officers forged a credential for him.[26](#)

Reuther was, in many ways, to US unionism what Ford was to US industry. Arrogant, brash, bright, bold, unrelentingly ambitious, hypocritical, isolated, in constant need of ego reinforcement, well turned out, educated (unlike Ford), eager for the respect and status that he felt his role in labor deserved, if not laborers themselves, a small reflection of the powerful, Reuther was good at creating an impression of radicalism (anti-racism for example, when his social practice was racist to the core), and assembling the narrowest interests of people to serve his own agenda under the guise of the common good, much like capital moves its personifications to rush toward its rewards, fear its discipline, and to ignore its existence.[27](#)

Let us pick up with the chronology we left off in the mid-thirties.

As the CPUSA line shifted from the radical Third Period (up to 1935, fascism seen as a logical result of capital's processes, Roosevelt presented as a social fascist) to the Popular Front (after 1935, Roosevelt and the AFL leadership as allies), so did UAW leaders (personified by Walter Reuther) begin to maneuver to the front of the 1933-37 strike wave in order to dissipate it.

The highwater mark of the UAW was the 1937 Great Flint Strike against GM, then the world's largest corporation.

In Flint, a choke point of GM, producing key parts for all of its autos, militant rank-and-file workers, led by Wyndham Mortimer and other CP'ers, and Socialist Party actives seized plants, fought cops and the national guard, tricked company spies, fought racism in their own ranks, and took leadership from the Women's Emergency Brigade, which led a key battle in the strike. It was a strike initiated and sustained by masses of rank-and-file people.

Most likely, CIO leaders would have preferred the strike not to happen, and the AFL leadership did all they could to sabotage it. After 44 days of the sit down, the strike won. Thousands of workers marched through GM's company town, Flint, singing "Solidarity Forever." The victory: a one-page agreement recognizing the UAW as the bargaining agent. Shortly after, 100,000 workers joined the UAW, sit-downs broke out all over the US. It was clear, at last, that masses of workers could withdraw their labor, seize the work places their sweat created, halt production, locate key arteries to shut off all production throughout a corporation, defeat the armed forces of government, defy laws written on behalf of the company, and win through mass direct action. It was also abundantly clear to the workers that they could not have won without the leadership and experience of the Communist Party.[28](#) The 45-minute video, *With Babies and Banners, the Story of the Women's Emergency Brigade*, is an excellent educational tool to initiate research on the strike.

The UAW, led by Reuther and the CP, moved quickly to dispel that idea. Reuther and his brother Victor, who both once funneled money (\$50,000) for the CIA's efforts to destroy communist-inspired unions in post-WWII Europe, managed to demolish the idea of mass collective action for, not just wage hikes, but control of the work place, within just eight years. While Reuther competed bitterly with the CPUSA, it remains that their own actions helped make his career.[29](#)

Walter Reuther, like Ford, firmly believed in the ideology that propelled the AFL; the unity of labor leaders, government officials and businessmen (always men) in the national interest would best serve the workers, and all citizens of the USA. Reuther also understood that war means work, urging the expansion of war industries in combination with the auto industry.

While the CPUSA members ran errands for the many sectors of the CIO, including UAW officialdom, Reuther moved fast to high union office, clawing his way past the CPUSA. A combination of bad lines and good works may have wrecked CPUSA chances inside the UAW. The bad lines were the sudden shifts in CPUSA positions summarized above. Each shift in line had direct implications for workers in UAW plants. The good works were the persistent efforts of CPUSA members to build a base in the industrial working class, despite the rank opportunism of their leadership. However, during the Popular Front period the composition of the CPUSA changed dramatically. The numbers remained about the same, but the foot soldiers were often new recruits.

The 1935-41 Popular Front approach led CPUSA members to build alliances with what they saw as progressive sectors of the national bourgeoisie, as well as trade union leaders, various socialists, etc.; not taking a sharp approach with trade union leaders who often attacked the CPUSA. Then, vigorously opposing US war preparations during the Hitler-Stalin pact interlude -- meaning that, on the one hand, they were opposing the war-means-work outlook of many workers, and, on the other hand, they went quiet on the creation of Hitler's fascism -- the CPUSA in one instance maneuvered into opposing a convention resolution denouncing Hitler and Stalin.

The CPUSA helped lead strikes during the Hitler-Stalin period. On April 1, 1941, a mostly spontaneous strike broke out at the giant Dearborn fortress, the Ford Rouge Plant, where the 1932 Ford Hunger March had culminated in the death of five young marchers at the hands of Harry Bennett's Ford goons and the Dearborn police, where Walter Reuther and others had been beaten in 1937 at the notorious "Battle of the Overpass," and where the CPUSA had what was probably its deepest roots in the industrial working class, Rouge Local 600.[30](#) The strike shut down Fords entirely, immediately. Ford saw the writing on the wall and caved, only to move fast to use the union as yet another weapon against the workers, a new enforcer in the plants, as a partner in production. Ford gave the UAW check-off, mandatory dues collection. *Daily Worker* sports columnist Billy Allen raptured that the ten-day strike proved "the great organized strength of the Ford workers was mightier than all of Ford's millions and his tons of propaganda, and thousands of Gestapo-like servicemen and stool-pigeons."[31](#)

Henry Ford saw it a little differently. He had agreed to the dues check off: "That will make us their bankers, won't it? Then they can't get along without us. They'll need us just as much as we need them."[32](#)

Another strike, at North American Aviation, was a disaster. Roosevelt called out 2500 troops and crushed it, attacking the CP for undermining efforts for what was surely a coming war. There was even talk of opening camps to hold anti-war radicals. Some ally. Reuther and his "anti-communist" base (assuming the CPUSA was a communist group, which it was only in name) then attacked the CPUSA for leading a failed strike.

So, the CPUSA was hung on twin petards: supporting Roosevelt and witnessing his attacks on their own members. Then, with lightening speed came the German invasion of the USSR on June 22, 1941. The Luftwaffe wiped out the entire Soviet air force, putting one of many lies to the Stalinist defense that the Hitler-Stalin pact was a ruse to buy time, that Stalin was simply preparing for the war he knew would come. The General in charge of the Soviet air force was subsequently executed. The Russians, now wholly motivated by calls to defend the Motherland (nearly all vestiges of defending socialism came to an end), were technologically out-gunned, but they had the Germans outnumbered about three to one, they were on their own land and knew the vast terrain (and the weather), began their scorched earth retreat and retrenchment, and prepared to return to Eastern Europe.

The CPUSA immediately cried, "all out for the war effort;" sought and tried to enforce a "no strike pledge," from the UAW and its members. During the war the members of the CPUSA not only fought against any form of class struggle in the plants; they also battled for incentive pay, wage differentials, indeed, they mimicked Stalin's actions in the USSR. Reuther defeated the CPUSA on those issues, and publicized it. But he very quietly supported the no-strike pledge, and began to work to bar reds from the UAW and CIO.

Throughout these dizzying vacillations, the CPUSA rank and file kept plugging along, keeping track of the all-important sales figures for the *Daily Worker*, although the composition of membership changed. Many working-class people left the party between 1937 and 1945, and many middle-class people came in. The CPUSA and class struggle came to have nearly nothing in common.

As the war wore on (remember the US only entered the European campaign in 1944) on the home front the class struggle intensified. Speed-ups, stretch-outs, inflation, boredom, dangerous working conditions, set the stage for an outburst of wartime wildcat strikes. By 1944, UAW President R.J. Thomas said, "strikes are destroying the UAW." In 1943, there were 153 wildcats. In 1944, 50% of the UAW rank and file had wildcatted. The CPUSA fought them every step of the way, even harder than the UAW administration. By the end of the war it was consistent for CPUSA leader Earl Browder to say, "[we will] oppose class conflict after the war is over, and defend capitalism as it is in our country."[33](#)

In 1942, the war labor board gave recognized unions the mandatory dues check-off, thus using the force of the state to ensnare rank-and-file workers in unions which were quite openly working in league with the employers -- a long, long way from the IWW's, "the working class and employing class have nothing in common."

During the war, the population of Detroit and other cities changed dramatically. Southern rural white and black people moved to the urban areas in droves, hurrying to the factory jobs that the war demanded. Black workers were greeted by cruel segregated slum life, not allowed in public housing, but for the Brewster Projects. That left shanty homes with open fires for heat, little plumbing, overcrowding, and the noise that typifies poor urban life. In Detroit, black people were slotted into Paradise Valley, what some today see as a whirl of cultural activity, community, music, and joy -- and surely it was. But it was also a slum with all the attendant health problems (from TB to dental carries). Schools, like the military, were segregated and grotesquely unequal. The Detroit cops, always noted for corruption (one Detroit police chief was caught with one million dollars in cash, stashed in his ceiling at home; his comment, "Where did that come from?"), were truly a white occupying force in black neighborhoods. In the factories, as always, black workers got the worst jobs, in segregated sections of shops, though radicals and communists consistently struggled to integrate work life. Especially at Fords, the racist Black Legion and the Klan operated openly.

Poor white workers faced somewhat better conditions, found better jobs more easily. There was full (war) employment, but food was rationed. People had pay, but not much to spend it on. White workers were pummeled every day with not only the racist attitudes that others brought to the plants, but with propaganda coming from the likes of remnants of the fascist radio priest, Charles Coughlin's movement originating from the towering Shrine of the Little Flower in Royal Oak, four miles north of the Detroit line.<sup>34</sup> Detroit had a long history of struggles to integrate housing. People had been killed for that alone. Black workers trying to improve work life, home life, met similar resistance from white workers in a city which had once elected a Klansman as mayor. It was easy to see strife coming. In 1943, a white pogrom erupted in Detroit. Dozens of black people were killed, the official count was 34.

The UAW and CPUSA both claimed, later, to have intervened, but it was much too little, much too late, as a handful of stewards could not halt the armed battles in the streets. Wartime nationalism and racism were reinforced by the unions, and not countered much by the CPUSA. Both chose to ignore A. Phillip Randolph's 1941 call for a march on Washington, cancelled when Roosevelt issued an order, rarely enforced, to desegregate defense industries (not the military).

At the end of the war, pent up worker anger coupled with a rightful view that corporations had grown rich during the war, off the backs of workers, and that there was plenty to share around. The war had, in fact, accelerated the process of linking government, industry, into what Eisenhower in 1961 called the "military industrial complex," warning of their rule. The corporations, not surprisingly, were not inclined to

share, but they recognized a potential threat to their power in the wildcats of the war years -- as did Reuther and the UAW leadership.

Two key contrasting strikes broke out after the war: the Allis-Chalmers strike that began on April 30, 1946, and the General Motors strike. They were very, very different.

Allis-Chalmers was based in Wisconsin, but had nearly 12,000 production workers throughout the US. It had enjoyed enormous windfall profits during the war, though it was mainly an agricultural implements manufacturer. The profits amounted to more than \$35 million. The executives at Allis-Chalmers were drawn from the far right of the US political spectrum, including members of the old anti-semitic, pro-fascist, America First League, led by Charles Lindbergh, among others.

Allis-Chalmers Local 248 had been active since the early thirties, led by communists and socialists who may have had a mass base of support among the workers. They led the bargaining committees, flying squadrons, educational works, grievance committees, and held voting majorities in the local's day to day life, not through elaborate machinations, but democratically won support, for the most part.

They did, though, expel serious dissidents, as did most other UAW locals of the time. However, they also turned in dissidents to the company, for dismissal. It is not unfair to say that many of the undemocratic processes the CPUSA installed when they were popular in unions were later used to lock them out, forever -- and the rank and file, too. The local consistently supported CPUSA motions regarding political action, took part in CPUSA educational programs, and was, at the end of the day, a local fairly run by the actives, most of whom denied they were in the CPUSA. Most assuredly, they were.

The Allis-Chalmers strike lasted for eleven months. The local met the predictable attacks of the press, with their own press. They countered the incessant anti-communism that came from nearly all quarters with the reasonable rebuttal that working conditions at Allis-Chalmers must have been truly awful to create so many communists inside. They met violence from company goons on the picket lines with sharp responses from their own flying squads.

But the Allis-Chalmers strikers were also attacked by the government. The strike leaders were hauled into House Un-American Activities hearings, demanding to know if they were in fact reds. They denied it.

At the same time, Reuther and his anti-communist forces, who had managed to draw in many old radicals who were appalled by the CPUSA's wartime activity, quietly undercut the union leadership, backing a competing return-to-work movement.

The Allis-Chalmers strike collapsed. Its leaders were fired and, worse, sentenced to prison for lying to the government about their political lives.<sup>35</sup> The Allis-Chalmers strikers, many of them WWII veterans, were defeated by the violent unity of government, business, and their own union.

The GM strike of 1945-1946 was quite different. The pent-up issues for the work force were much the same as at Allis-Chalmers; from on-the-job speed-up, domineering foremen, racism directed at, especially, black workers, the 48-hour week leftover from the "all out for the war effort" days, danger on the job (it was a time when Detroit had a public transportation system, easy to see the auto workers on the bus; they had fewer fingers), and, of course, pay and benefits.

At GM, the UAW leadership, behind Reuther, created what may have been the first of many UAW spectacles to come: a strike charade.

On August 18, 1945, Reuther, his reputation as a militant intact because he had the CPUSA's complete smash-up at Allis-Chalmers as a counterpoint, demanded a 30% wage hike from GM, adding a twin demand: no price hikes from the company.

GM, autocratic as ever, was not about to let Reuther determine the price of cars, nor about to cave in to a wage hike of that sort.

On November 21, 1945, about 180,000 GM workers shut down the plants. This was the first time that Reuther's one-company-at-a-time strategy came into play, sold as a way to whipsaw the auto giants, playing one company off against another. In fact, it whipsawed the workers, institutionalizing apathy toward solidarity across the industry. The auto bosses never lost their own sense of solidarity.

The GM strike lasted 113 days. When the CPUSA-led United Electrical Workers Union settled with GM for 18.5 cents, and the Steelworkers took the same deal, Reuther easily sold the same package to the rank and file -- language-halting price hikes forgotten. It was an agreement that probably could have been won without the strike, but Reuther learned how to let the members blow off steam, softening them up for a settlement.

The workers believed they won the GM strike. Many believed Reuther was responsible for the victory. Walter Reuther, positioned against the wreckage of the Allis-Chalmers debacle, set out to use the CPUSA as a step on his ladder to complete control of the UAW.

By 1947, following bitter, often violent, convention battles, Reuther had driven the reds out of the union's leadership. Moreover, he linked any centrist opposition to his control to the CPUSA, and drove many of them, like R.J. Thomas, to posts of little authority.

In the late 1940's, Reuther turned his sights on the CPUSA's United Electrical Workers Union, funneling what may have been thousands of UAW dollars into a campaign to create a competing union, the IUE. Reuther also worked with the leaders of the craft-AFL, the bitterly anti-communist Association of Catholic Trade Unionists, and the employer at General Electric. Reuther indeed wrecked most of the UE (though the UE lives even today, and can take pride that in 1964 it was the first union to oppose the war

in Vietnam, and really the only union that did anything about it), perhaps eliminating what was his most useful whipping post.[36](#)

In 1949, Reuther led a CIO delegation to Europe, establishing the International Conference of Free Trade Unions to battle the Soviet-led World Federation of Trade Unions. No one has fully explored the potential links of the UAW, Reuther, and US intelligence agencies, though it is commonly understood that the AFL-CIO and the Central Intelligence Agency have had close ties for decades, most recently working together through the National Endowment for Democracy in efforts to destabilize the elected Chavez government in Venezuela.

In 1952, Reuther became president of the CIO. Claiming that key social issues could not be won at the work place, nor at the bargaining table, he focused CIO activity on electoral work, throwing the resources of the UAW behind the Democratic party. So Reuther linked himself with Democratic leaders, while the CPUSA, repeatedly choosing lesser evil Democrats over Republicans (the logic of the Popular Front) swallowed hard and handed out leaflets for him.

As Reuther's power deepened throughout the plants, reaching down to the stewards, the geography of power shifted. Every aspect of UAW activity moved the rank and file farther and farther away from the place where they created value, the work place itself. Each step of the grievance procedure took the worker farther and farther from the plant, and located power in lawyers and arbitrators. Electoral work centered power in the ballot, and politicians. Any analysis of government as a "weapon of the rich," as distinct from a relatively neutral body solving problems in the national interest, that is a Marxist analysis of the state, evaporated from CPUSA and UAW talk. Bargaining sessions became secret; important bargaining was located far from the plants, and very important bargaining was conducted by very, very few people.

In 1955, Reuther led the CIO into the American Federation of Labor, probably believing that AFL president George Meany would die soon, and with Reuther succeeding him. There were, by that time, few differences between the AFL and CIO, but the merger was rocky; Meany lived. Reuther took the UAW out of the AFL-CIO in 1968, joining the gangster-dominated Teamsters in a brief alliance. The UAW rejoined the AFL-CIO in the eighties, and remained inside the federation at the time of the 2005 split when, led by SEIU's Andy Stern, four unions marched out, claiming the AFL-CIO didn't know how to organize anyone.

While Reuther claimed allegiance to the civil rights movement, little changed in the plants for black workers. He betrayed the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party in 1964, joining with Hubert Humphrey to broker a back door deal to allow a segregated Mississippi delegation seats at the Democratic Convention. The rise of the wildcatting RUM's (Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement, Eldon Revolutionary Union Movement, etc.) led by black auto workers in the early seventies stand as evidence that racism remained part of the toolbox for auto bosses, and the union.[37](#)

Walter Reuther ran the UAW for twenty-four years, dying in May, 1970, with his wife in a plane crash on the way to the UAW compound at Black Lake, Michigan. Black Lake, an education center that was, in fact, UAW party central, used as a reward to the faithful and denied to all others (including Maurice Sugar, a Detroit labor lawyer whose pivotal role in the foundation of the UAW cannot be denied and who lived near Black Lake, but was never allowed inside). Black Lake was Reuther's monument to himself, costing \$23 million in 1960's dues dollars.

While Reuther claimed to solve problems of the social contract (not contradictory relationship) of capital and labor (like his demand to review the books at GM, calls for limits on auto costs, claims of victories in health and safety-setting up health plans for UAW members meant opposing national health insurance -- and a vaunted jobs protection program that never protected jobs), Reuther really only addressed the most narrow bread-and-butter issues, always trading a wage increase for control of the methods and products of production, not unlike the project of the entire AFL-CIO.

The UAW said nearly nothing about the war in Vietnam, perhaps distinguishing the union from others that marshaled large sections of white male unionized workers in demonstration in favor of it. The US labor movement has been consistent in support for foreign wars, boosting production and jobs, always tying the interests of the upper divisions of the working class to their national employers. But the deal began to crumble when the Vietnamese crushed the US militarily, politically, morally, and especially economically, best typified by the cowardly US flight from the Saigon embassy on April 29, 1975, abandoning not only US allies on the ground, beating those who tried to hang from helicopter struts, but also leaving behind lists of Vietnamese who had collaborated with the US, spied, future attendance sheets in re-education camps. The US economy was powerful when the nation entered the war, the greatest creditor country in the history of the world. In 1975, the US was the greatest debtor nation in the history of the world, and it never recovered. The US labor movement began to fill the role of Vietnamese collaborators.

In the mid-seventies, banker Felix Rohatyn and Albert Shanker of the American Federation of Teachers, close friends who frequently dined together at New York's finest eateries, joined together to turn the New York teachers' pension funds over to the city administration, to "save the city." Shortly thereafter, Chrysler Corporation came to the UAW insisting on concessions to save American jobs, and the company.[38](#)

In 1980, Ronald Regan crushed Patco, the air traffic controllers union, led by former Vietnam vets, when the little union thought it would automatically win AFL-CIO support on its picket lines. The AFL-CIO let Patco swing in the wind. They had offended the union bosses by endorsing Regan, and not asking permission to strike.

In 1979, Chrysler, under former Ford executive Lee Iacocca (designer of the Mustang), began a two pronged campaign: (1) a demand for a one billion dollar bailout from the combined treasuries of the State of Michigan, the federal government, and the UAW, in the forms of wage and benefit concessions. The UAW vigorously backed the



campaign, urging the UAW members to donate to "their" company. UAW also joined Chrysler and the auto industrialists to promote a vicious racist, (2) "Buy American," campaign, blaming Asian people above all for the ruin of the US auto industry, even outstripping the campaign coming from the industry itself. The auto bosses complained that American auto workers were unproductive, costing more per vehicle than, say, Japanese workers. The UAW insisted that American workers were just fine, but only dissidents noted that the auto bosses had rarely reinvested in aging plants, forcing, for example, workers in the Ford Rouge Iron Foundry to labor in an eighty-year-old facility that blew up from time to time, killing workers. Instead, the UAW posted a huge, "Park Your Foreign Car Across the Street," sign in their parking lot, causing some of their staff to begin to work from home. In exchange for their support, UAW president Douglas Frazier was appointed to the Chrysler board.

The one-billion-dollar bailout came with a codicil that the UAW make \$400 million worth of concessions. The UAW leadership sold that to the rank and file on the grounds that concessions would save jobs. The day the package was signed, with the State of Michigan kicking in millions, the state slashed welfare grants in order to pay for the deal.

The racist "Buy American" campaign never abated, especially in Detroit. In 1981, a white auto foreman and an auto worker beat Vincent Chin, a young Chinese man, to death with baseball bats in the middle of Woodward Avenue, in the full view of witnesses, including cops. The two men were arrested but served little jail time, less than three months. Their wives said they were just good guys gone a little wrong. They thought Vincent Chin was Japanese.[39](#)

The Chrysler bailout initiated a stream of UAW concessions, so many they are hard to chronicle. Let us stick with a summary of Chrysler, perhaps more graphic than Ford and GM, but an example of the rule, not the exception.

The oil embargo, the loss in Vietnam, and other factors combined to create an inflationary spiral under President Jimmy Carter that reached nearly 20%, an economic attack on any person who does not have the capital to invest elsewhere, who must rush to a bank and get rid of a paycheck which is worth less hour to hour. The auto companies, again, blamed foreign interference as Japanese cars began to eat into the auto market, never noting that failure to invest in design and energy efficiency was hardly the responsibility of the Japanese, whose new plants had been built by US investments in order to hold back the Chinese and Soviets.

Between 1980 and 1990, Chrysler closed more than 30 plants in the US, laid off about 45% of both its blue-collar and white-collar workforce, or about 65,000 people. The UAW continued to make concessions and, in several cases, made the workers vote on concession contracts over and over again, voting until they got it right. Marc Stepp, the boss of the UAW's Chrysler division, said these multiple cuts and concessions were necessary "to preserve the American system of profits." GM and Ford followed the Chrysler cuts closely, making the same demands on their workers, while all the auto

companies began to whipsaw American cities, demanding free land, tax breaks, and low cost workers in exchange for existing.

In this same period, the UAW began to agree to multi-tier wage rates, especially in feeder plants for the Big Three. The tiered wage systems then appeared on Big Three bargaining tables, and the auto industry began to spin off internal operations like Delphi that could, then, make even harsher demands for lower wages for younger workers (destroying the structural solidarity of workers inside the plants -- in a union which had always insisted on same work, same pay).

And, in the same period, the UAW began to openly criticize its members for absenteeism, from plants that were operating at levels of speed-up hard to imagine.

In 1985 the Canadian auto workers split from the UAW, saying the US union had lost sight of its reason to exist. The UAW international had insisted the Canadian workers fall in line with the spirit of concessions and threatened to withhold strike funds. Canadian leader Bob White said, "You don't need a union to walk backwards." While there was an appearance of a principled struggle in the split, the reality was that the Canadian Auto Workers leadership merely felt they were more sophisticated in creating a close relationship with employers, and thus better able to hold the allegiance of the rank and file.[40](#)

In 1995, Mercedes Benz announced it would open a plant in Alabama, after causing other states to compete in a race to the bottom for tax breaks. MB promised jobs for Alabamans. MB began an association with Daimler corporation.

In 1997, a bitter, violent strike at the Chrysler Mound Road Plant outside Detroit was defeated.

And, in 1997, the UAW took leadership in the Detroit Newspaper Strike, following promises from the top leadership of the AFL-CIO that the Newspaper Guild Employees and Teamsters would have the full support of labor in "Union Town." However, the UAW and AFL-CIO leaders did not want their plans for a 1998 electoral victory to be dashed by the street battle that the Detroit newspapers promised, hiring scabs, goon squads, and using the local police as strong arms of the corporations. The owners openly declared they wanted to smash the unions.

The UAW led the strike because they led Detroit; little moves in the labor movement there without UAW direction. No one took the time to explain the issues of the strike to the citizens of a town that, by then, was about 90% black, facing overwhelming unemployment reaching 50% for black youth. Very few people in Detroit ever learned the demands of the strikers. Citizen support was simply, and wrongly, assumed.

But the UAW did a lot to discourage it. On picket lines near big newspaper plants northeast of Detroit, UAW thugs assaulted citizen and union member picketers, not scabs, and turned them in to the police. Individual strikers ceded their analytical abilities

to leaders they should have known were corrupt, and they trusted those leaders to create a magical victory. Before the strike, at the strike votes, there was no real planning or discussion about the next step, a step that IWW analyst Eric Chester makes clear is the necessary stoppage of production. Instead, at mass meetings the strikers cheered and applauded the "new" leaders of the AFL-CIO (Sweeney and others were still running for election then) and believed it when the hacks, said, "No matter what it costs, the AFL-CIO will never let this become another PATCO." So after a twenty-year period in which the AFL-CIO beat up nobody but their own members, the newspaper strikers actually believed they would be saved by the AFL-CIO.

Finally, an unconditional surrender was announced to the strikers. In several cases, no votes on the contract were taken -- just announced. Some local strikers and union leaders never got their jobs back.[41](#)

1999: Chrysler recorded profits of \$5.2 billion, its best year. US car companies made a record \$18 billion in profits, while employing a half million fewer workers than they employed two decades earlier.

As the 1990s came to an end, Ford Motor Company agreed to organize any future plants on behalf of the UAW, there would never be another organizing campaign necessary at Fords.

2000: Chrysler announced enormous blue-collar and white-collar layoffs, 26,000 jobs, or 20% of its workforce. The cuts were supported by the UAW, which said they were necessary to save the company.

2000: Chrysler "merged," with the German company, Daimler-Benz. In reality, Chrysler sold itself to Daimler. Chrysler's 30 top executives milked the company for \$395.8 million in cash and stocks when the merger with Daimler-Benz was completed. Chrysler Chairman Robert Eaton alone received a pay-out of \$69.9 million, plus the option to cash in his 2.3 million shares of Daimler-Chrysler stock. The same executives negotiated, as a condition of the merger, \$96.9 million in severance packages in the event they were fired or otherwise removed. Several of the executives took advantage of these "golden parachutes" and bolted from the company before the current crisis hit. The UAW was removed from the Chrysler board.

2003: In Alabama, the Daimler-Mercedes partnership began to import workers from Poland, paying them less than the wages common to locals, arguing that the Polish workers did jobs that required special skills unavailable in the US. The jobs were routine factory positions, involving painting and cutting. "We were a little bit shocked when we came here -- that people live in trailers, there are forests, no skyscrapers."[42](#)

On July 3, 2006, the UAW president, Ron Gettelfinger, was appointed to the Daimler-Chrysler board. The timing of his appointment is worth noting; just days after the UAW convention in Las Vegas.

Between 2001 and 2003, 2.7 million jobs were lost in the United States, the vast majority of them industrial jobs that will never be restored. Since the post-Vietnam war aggressive presidency of Ronald Reagan, inequality boomed in the US, especially so under George W. Bush. Thousands of auto jobs were, first, shipped to Mexico's border maquiladora plants but, from 2003 to 2005, about 200,000 of those jobs in Mexico were sent to China where it is now possible to use the ruthless power of the Chinese Communist Party to exploit workers at rates that make it cheaper to do production in China and ship materials back across the Pacific than to pay a worker in Mexico \$1.45 an hour.[43](#)

The UAW made no effort to organize plants in Mexico and, as noted above, lost its affiliate in Canada. The UAW never pushed for a shorter work week, with no cut in pay, to preserve jobs and income in the US. Instead, the UAW mustered all its might to convince its members that workers and bosses have more in common than not, to sacrifice their lives for US capital -- and it worked.

The UAW has said nothing at all about the promise of united Democrats and Republicans for a future of perpetual war.

Today, however, US might stands exposed. The military has been fought to a standstill in Afghanistan and Iraq. China, Japan, and the European Union, all need the Caucasus, Venezuelan, and Middle Eastern oil fields as badly as the US does -- mainly to fuel their militaries.

The US economy teeters on bankruptcy, dependent on a veritable donor nation: China.

Intensified competition, coupled with the myopic view of US capital which promoted national de-industrialization (the President of US Steel, when asked how he could demand and win big concessions from his Steelworker Union members, then turnabout and buy a Canadian liquor company, said, "Look, I am not in business to make steel; I am in business to make money"), means that there fewer treasures left over to bribe the aristocrats of US labor, making the situation more desperate. While the UAW has used violence to protect its leaders' interests in the auto companies, the UAW has also laid off about one-third of its staff in the last decade.

Fascism emerges in US society in the forms of constant surveillance, militarism, rise of private militias and mercenaries, the intensification of the role of government as a club of wealth, rising inequality, racism, and sexism-and popular irrationalism. There is urgency within this historical moment for an egalitarian vision and social action.

### **What of the Reformers and What of Today?**

*"Reformers is mornin' glories-looked lovely in the morning and shriveled up in a short time, while the regular machines kept on flourishin' forever, like fine old oaks."* (George Washington Plunkett, of Tammany Hall)[44](#)

Three kinds of reformers set out to influence the UAW since the Communist Party lost its hold on UAW offices: Trotskyists, academics, and public employee radicals. None has had much impact.

### *Trotskyists*

The Trotskyists re-entered the UAW in 1979 through their *Labor Notes*, a tabloid publication designed to center the struggle for democracy and action in the labor movement, "putting the movement back into the labor movement."[45](#)

Labor Notes conferences are dedicated, not to an examination of the processes of capitalism nor calls to go beyond it, but to complaints of undemocratic activity and inaction inside unions that are openly undemocratic and inactive -- and plans for better days within unionism. Those who show up at Labor Notes conferences -- which usually involve around 1,000 people demanding to talk about capitalism, exploitation, alienation, and revolution -- are routinely set apart, not invited back.

Labor Notes activists played very minor roles in the Detroit Newspaper strike, where they might have been expected to shine.

The greatest success of Labor Notes came in the Teamsters' Union. LN-backed Teamsters for a Democratic Union, after years of struggle, won the election of Ron Carey to the presidency. Carey quickly dismissed the TDU staffers from his executive board, re-established Teamster connections with the Mob, then was driven from the union for engaging in a money-laundering scheme with other officials in the AFL-CIO. Since TDU had built Carey's base, and not a base of rank-and-file class-conscious activists, they came away with nothing.[46](#)

Several LN activists became skilled trades workers in UAW plants. Unless they are operating in deep underground roles, to my knowledge they just disappeared into well-paying, fairly interesting work. Other reformers wound up with UAW jobs and disappeared into the cult of loyalty that propels most US unions.

Labor Notes appears to be propelled by the "official optimism" that Lenin warned about (above), best summarized by the former leader of the International Socialists (who inspired LN), Hal Draper (brother of Theodore Draper): "The class character of an organization does not depend on its ideas, it depends on its objective role and function in society."[47](#) In other words, put unwitting people in motion and they will stumble into social revolution, and sustain it; a position history scoffs at.

Running now at odds with Labor Notes are a very few once-radicals in the UAW, like Bob King, formerly the president of the Ford Rouge Local 600, the UAW local with the longest history of communist, anarchist, and radical influence. It was not fifteen years ago that King talked of mass actions in the labor movement, of thousands of people on picket lines, of democracy in the union. Today, King is the UAW director of organizing. The UAW organizes nearly no one, and King is unheard from. His career is like many

others, UAW writers, educators, organizers, people who simply vanished into the salaried halls of Solidarity House, which they must reach by driving through the ruined, bombed-out, drug-infested streets of Detroit, the most segregated city in the US.

### ***Academic Radicals***

Academics have sought to uncritically back the UAW and the labor movement, sometimes using the erudite, yet radical, *Monthly Review* as a voice. Former professor Michael Yates has written extensively to buttress big labor and its reform, as has Stanley Aronowitz, Cary Nelson, and many others. Predictably, nearly nothing has come of it, except to line the pockets, and polish the doors, at the UAW's Solidarity House and give credence to the AFL-CIO's quisling policies, under the pretense of union reform, as if that was possible. Indeed, these same people repeatedly serve as handmaidens for capital's Democratic Party as well, claiming to hold their noses, of course.[48](#)

The UAW sought to move into academia by organizing teaching assistants and lecturers more than a decade ago. Since then, the UAW has learned nearly nothing about academic organizing, except to win a few campaigns, bargain a contract guaranteeing dues deduction, and to leave.

At the New School in New York City an ongoing struggle between the organized UAW teaching assistants and the university President, Bob Kerrey -- a favorite to many liberals, and a Vietnam war criminal who called killing innocent civilians "like drowning cats" -- has dragged on for months. Kerrey flatly refuses to renew the UAW contract, putting dues income at risk -- a battle the UAW will heartily join. But they don't know how. The UAW is unable to build a consistent base of support among privileged, established academics, and unable to retain volunteer graduate students who are, themselves, among the most privileged people in the world.

There is no structure of a union local. The academics do not participate; many if not most do not pay dues. The UAW International keeps insisting that the non-payers be fired, a view not shared by local leaders. Staffers complain there is no local paper and top-down control deters even the most dedicated NYU activists. So following their usual tactic, the UAW seeks to create political pressure to embarrass NYU into continuing its relationship with the union.

In the spring of 2006, academics like Cary Nelson engaged in some pre-arranged arrest charades with the New York police, but again, nothing moved. UAW leader Elizabeth Bund insists, "when we win NYU, we will go on to Yale."

Perhaps there is a sheen of action that comes with promoting the UAW and US unionism today. Otherwise, there is no excuse. Should teaching assistants, lecturers, and others, win the UAW, they will only have won another layer of enemies.

### ***Radical Public Workers***

The fastest growing section of the State of Michigan work force, represented by SEIU, is composed of prison employees, a unit which now holds about 10,000 workers. But State of Michigan employees in UAW Local 6000 (most of them social workers) represent the largest UAW local in the world, with about 20,000 members. (Other state workers belong to a variety of unions; SEIU, AFSCME, POM, and an independent association.) Local 6000 is the inheritor of militant histories absent from other state unions.

Local 6000 embraces former members of the Welfare Employees Union, a tough independent once representing about 3,000 people, based mostly in Detroit's Wayne County Department of Social Services. WEU had been the home and cradle to a variety of city radicals, including some of the founding members of the anarchist Fifth Estate newspaper, leaders from the League of Revolutionary Black Workers, the Communist Labor Party, the IWW, the Progressive Labor Party, and others. WEU had led unsuccessful fights for collective bargaining, seized buildings in sit-down actions, and developed a tradition of "the ferocious defense of the rank and file, by the rank and file," which reverberated long after its demise in the late 1970's.

In addition, Local 6000 includes in its top leadership former members of the State Workers Organizing Committee which sought to organize state workers, community people, and clients, focusing on a program which sprang from a program with a familiar foundation: "Working people and bosses have nothing in common but opposition."

SWOC functioned as a caucus within several state unions, usually holding the leadership in Wayne County (Detroit) locals. At one point, in a battle with the state about welfare cuts, SWOC leaders assaulted the heads of state departments leading a meeting at the Detroit Fair Grounds by dumping live snakes on them.

In another instance, SWOC members invaded the state capitol moments before Governor James Blanchard's inauguration, burned his 20-foot campaign banner on the steps of the capitol building, and held him hostage while the assembled state legislators waited for negotiations about welfare cuts to conclude. In 1982, when AFL-CIO officials tried to hold a secret Lansing meeting with the governor's representatives to quietly gain a concession contract, SWOC members broke down doors, invaded the meeting, and their arrests sabotaged the concession process.

While the UAW was making concession after concession from 1970 until 1985, SWOC activists halted concessions from the state workforce.

It was, later, SWOC leadership that suggested and won affiliation with the UAW after offering the 55,000-member state work force to the Michigan Education Association, whose leaders rejected them, and the chance to control Michigan politics, because they were not teachers. The UAW won an election decertifying another union on the promise of delivering collective bargaining to Michigan state employees.

Quickly, second-tier SWOC leaders moved into high UAW Local 6000 positions, fought among themselves, and established small fiefdoms around the state. Today, more than a decade later, only a handful of former activists hold power in the union, most having dropped out of unionism altogether. The local now is run, for the most part, by people who have no history of action on the job, a badge of the entire labor movement.

However, in 1999, even the local bureaucrats got restless. The state Civil Service Commission had issued an edict, underlining its "sovereign" control, saying that the Commission could and would overturn any and all sections of the UAW contract, day by day if necessary. Then the Commission moved to reduce retiree benefits and intensified a privatization plan that has slashed the state work force by about 18% in the last decade. Moreover, and perhaps more worrisome to union leaders, the Commission attacked the paid leaves that union leaders enjoy under the state contract. And, as a coup-de-grace the Commission sent a letter to every state employee, advising them of their right to quit the union and pay a service fee. Less than 1% did.

Feeling powerless to call a job action, Local 6000 officers decided to place the question of collective bargaining for state workers before the people, on the Michigan ballot in November 2000. To accomplish that goal, they would need more than 300,000 signatures on petitions. To do that, they would need 500,000 signatures to capture a valid group.

They felt they could do it. With 20,000 members, the leaders guessed they could mobilize 40,000 family members. Then add the vaunted clout of the UAW and the AFL-CIO, and it could be done. Following the tenets of the AFL-CIO "worker to worker campaign," an organizing strategy that seeks to get union members to vote by first involving them in issue-oriented work, Local 6000 suggested to the UAW hierarchy that they had a good plan, one that could mobilize many Michigan voters. The UAW even highlighted their idea in their magazine, "Solidarity." UAW Local 6000 readied by training 1,000 local leaders in the need for the petition drive. They were set to go.

In December, 1999, things got sticky. The UAW national leadership backed off. Assessing the situation, they realized that the collective bargaining petition could be easily linked to a tax increase, that their Democratic candidates in close elections would be whipsawed by demands for support and the attacks of conservative Republicans screaming "tax and spend." The UAW threw a series of maneuvers at the Local leaders: No, you cannot use Black Lake; No, the UAW cannot devote much attention to this; No, we won't be able to provide financial support.

The Local 6000 leadership pressed on regardless. They planned to begin the petition drive without the UAW support, and to gain enough signatures to demonstrate the viability of the campaign. They were convinced they could prevail if they could get their message to the citizens, though they had done no polling whatsoever.

The UAW got tough. Top UAW officers called the Local 6000 leadership to a meeting. They informed the local officials that they were jeopardizing the UAW's



electoral plans, that they would get no UAW or AFL support. To the contrary, a letter would be circulated to every local in the AFL, urging rejection of the petition. Furthermore, they hinted that local leaders who would be so irresponsible to do a thing like this were clearly financially corrupt. The local could be seized and they could be jailed. On the other hand, the UAW promised to think about supporting the proposal in 2002, although they noted there is a gubernatorial election then. They did offer up Black Lake, for training to be determined. The Local 6000 leaders, furious but overwhelmed, caved in. There will be no petition for collective bargaining in Michigan. Instead, they will be conducting a campaign for Al Gore -- from Black Lake. And, in the year 2002, they said they would try again since, "There is nothing else to do. We have gone limp." Meanwhile, they have notified the rank and file, in worker to worker meetings, that the UAW sold them out.[49](#)

So, good-bye, UAW. Having money is not having people, and the UAW will never have enough money to out-bribe Henry Ford or Bill Gates, one reason that electoral work falls flat. The UAW failed at every key juncture in its latest crises. It failed to organize the south, because workers could see what the UAW really is. It failed to organize in black and immigrant communities, especially Hispanic communities. It even lacked the imagination to go organize the computer industry, which could well have been easier than it looked. UAW members need to be read their union's obituary, written long ago.

**Is There Hope For The Labor Movement? No.  
Is There Hope For the Working Class? Yes.  
But Justice Demands Ideas, Focus, and Organization.**

*Narrator from the film Fearless Vampire Killers: "That night, fleeing from Transylvania, Professor Abronsius never guessed he was carrying away with him the very evil he had wished to destroy. Thanks to him, this evil would at last be able to spread across the world."*

Time to Put a Stake in the Vampire and Move Along.

The interests of the Labor Movement and the working class are different.

If we say the US Labor Movement is the AFL-CIO and the National Education Association (with more than 3 million members, the largest union in the US) there is no hope for the Labor Movement, and no reason to try to reform it. Rather, class conscious radicals need to act on the idea that to get beyond capitalism, an urgent life and death question for the entire world, outside organizations are necessary, organizations that grasp the notion that to get across the barriers capitalism creates, we need to overcome, not reform, the organizations it has created, including the unions. We need organization to act in concert, taking the lifetime battle seriously -- facing a highly organized, disciplined, ruthless opposition. With perpetual war and the emergence of fascism seen as the normal state of things, organized action demands focus.

The failure of socialism, little more than capitalism with a purportedly benevolent party at its head, demonstrates that class-conscious change agents need to ask at least three vital questions: (1) why is it that so many people are so easily turned into instruments of their own oppression? (2) what is it that poor and working people need to know in order to live reasonably free, connected, caring lives in equitable communities, and what kinds of organization can get us there? (3) what should be the focal point for those relatively few radicals in the US; where should we concentrate energy?

Of course, some people must simply do their political work where they happen to be trapped at the moment -- at some job. Funding is a serious problem for the left. But others can make job choices, place themselves where they may be most effective over time. I suggest that concentrations in trade union reform will never answer these questions.

Here are a few reasons why we must supercede unionism:

(1) The union leadership is utterly corrupt and cannot be transformed. The top leaders not only pay themselves more, and steal (note the steady stream of American Federation of Teachers bosses sent to prison for looting the teachers' union), they set up impassable hierarchies of power that reformers tend to mimic -- while at the same time the unions habitually mirror the organizational structures designed by managers in the industries they represent. These hierarchies are not set up to overcome a vicious, organized, foe, but to enforce the quasi-religious idea (coupled with privilege) that someone else can and should comprehend and change the world for members -- commonly called the union-as-a-vending-machine approach.

Over time, members learn to want to become like the bosses -- because this kind of maneuvering on the bosses' terrain can, sometimes, win short term gains -- rather than getting rid of the bosses, as demonstrated in the repeated demands for "respect."

The ability to control the work place becomes confused with ability to control the union, which is often a contradiction. There is no way to overcome this structural and psychological poisoning of the well.

The corruption of the US unions goes back to their founding moments, the AFL rotted with racism and nationalism at the outset, the CIO soon to follow. The AFL (and later CIO) leaders sought to sabotage every major labor struggle in the history of the US.

Today, the leadership is completely insulated with years of practice of atomizing resistance (and crushing it when necessary, as in the Chrysler Mack Avenue battles of 1973). People will no more get past union corruption than we can vote out capitalism itself. The game is rigged, a lesson from Ron Carey and the Teamsters for a Democratic Union, from P-9, the California Grocery Strike, the Detroit Newspaper Strike, the incessant concessions -- when it is clear that concessions don't save jobs but, rather, feed blood to sharks. The recent Ford contract, in which Ford agreed to organize its plants on behalf of the UAW, is clear evidence that the unions have become what they claim to oppose -- and many workers know it, as demonstrated by the repeated failures of the

UAW to organize new auto plants -- or the fact the UAW did nothing but make concessions as it lost a million members. The AFL-CIO is not going to be changed without direct action against its very foundations -- probably conducted by many people who are non-members.

(2) The union leadership is guided by a dishonest and largely fascist ideology that snares their membership base. That stance can be summed up by what NEA's former president, Bob Chase, calls New Unionism; the unity of business, government, and labor (all labor) in the national interest. But it is not new -- as we have seen in the history of the UAW above. It is what the pro-capitalist, imperialist, ideology of the AFL-CIO always has been. Many US workers, especially white men, made gains with this strategy in the last century, recognizing that history will be cruel to them as members of a class. The continuing appeal of nationalism inspires even new immigrant workers who "win" entry into the fallacious activism of the AFL-CIO, as the Justice for Janitors campaign shows.

Lenin was correct in his analysis of imperialism, saying that there is a direct line from the fruits of monopoly capitalism and imperialist war to the bribery that allows creation of a labor bureaucracy, aristocracy, which in turn betrays the interests of most workers in the world, and, as we have seen, eventually betrays many workers who think they shared the bribe themselves.

New Unionism is the ideology of Mussolini's corporate state, an important pillar of fascism. This ideology permeates every aspect of the US Labor Movement. (While some top AFL bosses oppose the war in Iraq, they follow John Kerry's line that it is being conducted improperly -- not that it is an imperialist oil war, a logical extension of capitalism, as is the war in Afghanistan, and the US invasion of the world.)

Fascist ideas appeal to large sectors of the labor movement. The rank and file of one of the fastest growing sectors of unionism: cops, prison guards, enforcement agents for Homeland Security, as well as members of the traditional craft unions -- all exerting terrific influence in the AFL-CIO.

(3) Even if union reformers succeeded in creating more democratic and egalitarian unionism, which the last sixty years suggests is unlikely, the unions would still be structurally unable to meet the challenges of capitalism itself. The unions do not unite people; they DIVIDE people ( by craft, skill, industry, race, sex, nation, public vs private, etc.). There are, nearly, no progressive lessons to be learned from the Labor Movement, except when the rank and file fights the union -- with the goal of overturning it entirely. The IWW notion above, that "The working class and the employing class have nothing in common," applies to workers and their union leaders as well.

(4) Many argue that radical work should be concentrated in the unions because "that's where the people are." Actually, that is where only about 12% of the people are. Most people do not belong to unions. Moreover, the industrial working class which once, under the banners of communists and the CIO in the thirties, civilized the US by winning the right to strike, to speak, for social security, medical care, and against child labor, this

once-powerful industrial work force is simply no longer centrally positioned to introduce change. Their jobs have been outsourced, and those who remain are relatively privileged, even though they are working long, long hours. These workers have been habituated to decades of retreats, concessions, and betrayals, and while it is reasonable to expect occasional outbursts, it is highly unlikely that they will take the lead in social change in the foreseeable future. Indeed, history suggests the outbursts of this privileged section of the work force (even at critical junctures, like the dockworkers' unfulfilled threats to strike against war), can as easily lead those workers to become fascists as anything else -- and recent trends in the US make this possibility more real than others.

(5) The central organizing point of life in North America -- the choke points of US society just like there were choke points in key plants in the Great Flint Strike Against GM in 1937 -- are no longer industrial work places, but schools, the military, and to a limited extent, prisons and the health care system: the carrot and the stick.

The velvet glove is usually more potent than the obvious iron fist. More than 49 million kids are in schools now, more than ever before. One-half of them will be draft-eligible in the next five years. Many people now rely on schools for safety, food, health care, mental care, and above all, a modicum of hope. When the hope from schools is extinguished, youth are the most likely to initiate the struggle for social change, even if they may not be able to carry it through to the end, as 1968 in France demonstrates.

School workers and kids now sit in the centripetal point of this society. Elites recognized this social shift from industrial work places to schools more than 20 years ago and began to try to gain more control over what is taught, how it is taught, the hours of work, etc. -- deepening the Taylorization of the work place -- culminating in the No Child Left Behind Act. The NCLB, which systematically sharpens structural inequality under the banner of bourgeois science, also opens the schools to an invasion of the military in the form of lying recruiters, ROTC programs, etc., with poor kids set up as key targets. Both of the school workers unions' leaders were formative supporters of the NCLB, taking out ads demanding school regimentation in the *New York Times* in cooperation with the Business Roundtable, the National Chambers of Commerce, etc.

Public schools are the most highly organized sectors of US society, the unions reflecting the apartheid nature of teaching in the US, with more than 90% of the work force white, and overwhelmingly middle class. More than four million people belong to the teacher unions. These huge unions (National Education Association and American Federation of Teachers) are not alike, but not fundamentally different, either.

The NEA is not part of the AFL-CIO; its members in convention in 1999 rejected a leadership scheme for a merger overwhelmingly. The NEA is somewhat more democratic than the rest of the labor movement, perhaps even somewhat less corrupt. Still, NEA remains controlled by a core of well-paid officials and wary staff who move up lock-step through the ranks. Campaigning for national NEA office involves investments of more than six figures. Rewards for even low-level local officials are plentiful, from time off the job to free travel and luggage, a sense of special importance, etc. Internal electoral

campaigns appeal directly to the lowest common denominator of delegate support, while delegates are distracted by an array of sideshows, from Gladys Knight and the Pips singing the national anthem, to the opportunity for out of town trysts.

The AFT, still in the shadow of Al Shanker, who initiated the concessions movement in the sixties, and whose close connections with US intelligence agencies helped make it possible for the AFL-CIO to spend more than one-half of its dues income outside the US (seeking to destroy left movements), is among the least democratic of unions, thoroughly debased by a caucus system which locks out dissent, and by fiefdoms created by top leaders. Many honest unionists are now petitioning to abolish the AFL's nearly lifelong relationship with US intelligence agencies and the CIA operated Solidarity Center -- a relationship a petition will not change. It's like trying to urge the spies to quit the CIA.

Even so, if NEA and AFT were to merge (most unlikely -- but analogous to the proposed mergers of AFL's biggest unions), they would still divide teachers and school support personnel, teachers and parents, and most especially teachers and students. The educator unions, like the rest of the unions, sever people so thoroughly that it is nearly unthinkable to have students or parents voting in union meetings, each interest of true class reduced to the lowliest individual's opportunism. A merged NEA-AFT union would still be rigidly hierarchical, still frozen inside the confines of approving capital's greed -- as is true of all the new formulas to reorganize the AFL-CIO.

School workers, whose jobs cannot be outsourced, fashion a product fundamentally different from most workers: kids as distinct from Pintos. Today, though school regimentation is indeed severe, much of teaching remains conversational, relatively interactive, and critical thinking remains the promise, though surely not the reality, of most schooling. Schools are unsettled work places.

The central players in schools are kids, kids of color representing a majority of US public school students. The poorest kids in schools are often met by the youngest, most inexperienced teachers -- which could mean the kids are being poorly served, or that younger teachers are more likely to lead resistance because they are most victimized by ponderous, multi-tier salary schedules, or that the younger teachers, who are trained in little more than standardized education, will play the role of missionaries for capitalism that most of their predecessors played. Those possibilities are up in the air, but the young teachers occupy a key choke point of society.

The key issue in schools is ideas, despite significant battles over class size, books, supplies, wages, etc. Elites know the key role of ideas, seeking to strangle creativity and criticism with standardized curricula and instruction -- under the false promise of achieving school equality.

The key issue in society is the fundamental need for an ideological shift -- new ideas leaping beyond immediate experience -- envisioning new ways to live and the paths to get there. While people must fight to subsist today (as the huge southern California grocery strike sellout indicates -- grocery clerks not being noted for militancy), more and

more struggle within capital's frameworks does not necessarily take anyone beyond capital -- not even intellectually. Practice without theory is just more practice. Investigating social practice, learning how to think, is part of every school's mission statement, though surely not one that is truly desired.

Part of theorizing, imagining, is naming. While the powerful conservative movement in the US has declared class war on the very mentioning of the reality of class war, liberals have responded by a full retreat, just ratifying conservatism, if slowing it down a bit. Even leftist-radical publications (*Labor Notes*, for example) are reluctant to name the class war a class war, a topic that is banned in k12 schools, along with other key issues of life: sexuality as a matter of pleasure, rational knowledge (beginning with the point that all religion is mythology), and freedom (impossible to teach in school due to the fear of rebellions from unfree youth, and fear of colleagues' condemnation. Recapturing the revolutionary reality of class conflict is key to understanding why society, and its schools, look like they do. It is commonly mistaken that teachers can teach "anything but class." I have found that to be true at every level of my own experience as an educator, yet also untrue. School workers can usually find spaces to treat their own material, judiciously, keeping their ideals and still teaching.

While there is no reason to believe that most teachers will play a progressive or revolutionary role (indeed, history suggests that most teachers will be reactionaries -- as their unions were in Nazi Germany) -- even a small minority of revolutionary teachers can play a key role in promoting not only critical analysis, but action. The main problem activist teachers frequently face is not so much obtrusive bosses, but the absence of thinking colleagues. Radical inclusive organization can meet that challenge.

The same logic applies to capital's schools that applies to capital's unions. These are not "semi-autonomous spaces"; they are capitalist schools and capitalist unions. The only thing semi-autonomous now is capital itself, and the potential conscious action of the working class. It follows that, at the end of the day, schools cannot be reformed either, they need to be overcome, transcended -- then reopened in entirely different ways, truly communal schooling in the midst of long-term social struggle.

There is experience with overcoming schooling, in the Mississippi Freedom Schools of the sixties, in the anti-apartheid schools in South Africa and the related guerrilla camps, in community study groups, etc. It is fairly easy to close schools (over wages, hours, working conditions, and the needs of kids, as in the Detroit School Strike of 1999), but it is not easy to close schools and run concurrent Freedom Schools. Envisioning the practical and theoretical aspects of that problem is vital now -- especially as we see youth walking out of schools more and more in protest of high-stakes testing, vampire military recruiters, the absence of supplies, or the easily seen inequality of daily school life.

The three questions posed above are pedagogical and practical questions. Schools play a key role in setting up willing servitude. Educational workers, from bus drivers to librarians to aides to teachers and media specialists, can help kids visualize a new world, and demonstrate the struggles that change necessitates. Where should we concentrate our

energy? There are easily distinguishable choke points of US society today, spots vital to society where those who work in them are not terribly snared by encrusted traditional reform groups like unions: schools, prisons, the transportation industry (frequently dominated by undocumented immigrants now), the military, the food industry (undocumented workers again), and the immigration movement itself, contradictory as a Mayday march hoisting US flags may be.

In each of these sectors, people are already founding quasi-workers' councils in cities all over the US, involving rank-and-file people from each sector.

Of these sectors, I think schools are key. And in schools we must go well beyond unionism. The Rouge Forum, *Substance Magazine* in Chicago, both seek to unite integrated communities in school-based struggles for justice. In the crisis of the US invasion of the world and an international war of the rich on the poor, justice demands greater attention to what and how people learn, connected to organization. And organization must be girded by an ethic that all understand, as all rise with all.

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### Notes

1 Membership and budget figures that follow are from "Honoring our Past, Forging Our Future," a Report of the UAW Secretary Treasurer, Elizabeth Bund, to the 34th UAW Convention (June 2006) Las Vegas. The figures, unaudited, are as of 12-31-05.

2 For a summary of the limited opposition in the June 12-15 2006 UAW convention, see online <<http://futureoftheunion.com/?p=2871>>.

3 *New York Times*, June 27, 2006, "GM Workers Take Buyout" online at <<http://www.nytimes.com/2006/06/27/automobiles/27auto.html?ex=1152072000&en=1a76e0ba75316d7f&ei=5070>>.

4 Meyer, S. (1981). *The Five Dollar Day*. Suny Press. NY. p1.

5 Ibid, p142.

6 Gibson, R. (2003) "Against Schindler's List," Black Radical Congress, online at <<http://www.pipeline.com/%7Ergibson/schindler.html>>.

7 Interview with author Marty Glaberman, April 5, 1998, Detroit, Wayne State University. See especially his *Working for Wages*, Bewick Press, Detroit.

8 "The IWW and the Vote" (undated pamphlet).

9 See, for example, Jeremy Brecher (1998 revised edition) *Strike*. South End Press. For what it is worth, I prefer the earliest edition.

10 For the most part, the IWW had been wrecked by the Palmer raids in the early twenties. Thousands of IWW leaders were rounded up, deported, dumped in the desert, held without bail; a red scare that followed the Russian Revolution. But the IWW lived on, exists today. The singer Utah Phillips is a prominent IWW. Their remarkably instructive "pyramid of the capitalist system," a color poster, is online at <http://www.rougeforum.org>.

11 History of the United Auto Workers and the Part Played by the AFL Officials, D.H. Bishop Collection, Box 1 Folder 2, last pages of packet 1, Reuther Library, Detroit. On the Motor Products Strike, see Karl Lore (1935), "Will the Auto Industry Strike Next," online at [http://www.marxists.org/history/etol/document/swp\\_us/willauto.htm](http://www.marxists.org/history/etol/document/swp_us/willauto.htm).

12 Kornbluh, J. (1996) *Rebel Voices*, an IWW Anthology, is the best overview of the IWW, though the IWW preamble and the IWW songbook, both online, tell most of the story.

13 A fine introductory book on the vile role of the AFL is Jack Scott's *Yankee Unions Go Home*. More recent work by Kim Scipes and Paul Buhle dealing with the relationship of the AFL-CIO and US spy agencies in seeking to destroy leftist movements worldwide is available on the web, and linked to my www site, <http://www.RougeForum.org>.

14 A chart, "Genealogy of US Labor," showing outlook, methods of organizing, approaches to racism and sexism, methods of action, practices, is on my www site and may be useful to educators doing introductory work on the unions: <http://www.pipeline.com/~rgibson/laborgroups.html>.

15 See, for example, the work of Theodore Draper, beginning with the *Roots of American Communism*, which takes the position that the CPUSA was wholly dominated by the Soviets. He was followed by his student, Harvey Klehr, who took a less nuanced view, profoundly anti-communist. See Klehr, *In Denial, Historians, Communism, and Soviet Espionage* (2005). Many "new" historians and others have taken the opposing view; that is, the CPUSA was mainly a rank and file indigenous movement that only responded to direction from the CPSU. See the work of Maurice Isserman, Mark Naison, Sean Wilentz, and many others, quite a few of them claiming roots in what is now the old New Left, though how active they may have been might be measured on a standard of arrests/academic degrees. A lengthy and informative debate between the thoughtful Draper, and some of his opponents, took place in a past *New York Review of Books*, August 15 1985, available online to subscribers only at [http://www.nybooks.com/articles/article\\_preview?article\\_id=5378](http://www.nybooks.com/articles/article_preview?article_id=5378). Grover Furr, whose extensive web page is a fine resource, maintains that Stalin was, more than not, a small "d" democratic leader, and that his policies were, in the context of the time, wise. I disagree but his argument can be found online in *Cultural Logic* (Issue 2005).



16 Robin D.G. Kelly, (1990) *The Hammer and the Hoe, Alabama Communists During the Great Depression*. UNC Press.

17 See Mike Davis, *Prisoners of the American Dream* (p57), for a description of the successful organizing drives during the Third Period, that time when the CPUSA sought to organize "class versus class from below," and rejected alliances with bourgeois parties, liberals and others -- and the subsequent shift to the right during the Popular Front period, drawing in, perhaps, more people, but less class consciousness. See also the description of the struggle in the Comintern in the R. Gibson, "The Promethean Literacy of Paulo Freire," online at <<http://www.pipeline.com/%7Ergibson/freirall.htm>>. (Just do a search for "Dutt." See also, Matthew Worley, editor, *In Search of Revolution*, Tauris Press, 2004, p203.)

18 It is clear today that Julius Rosenberg was indeed guilty of delivering materials on the atomic bomb to the USSR. Ethel Rosenberg, executed as well, was probably only involved at the most, peripherally. However, most of the information the Rosenbergs were said to have passed was available through other public sources. In my view, the Rosenbergs were executed because they were communists, and because they refused to announce it, remaining faithful to the party center to the end, when a counter-attack, ala Dimitroff in Germany, of, "yes, of course I am a communist and here is why . . ." might have served them well. Notably, the father of atomic research, Einstein, was not allowed into the U.S. atom bomb projects because of his socialist and anti-racist declarations, and while he was kept out, a raft of Soviet spies walked in. See J. Rosen (2001) *The Einstein Files*. For a graphic description of horrific conditions in the failed USSR, now Russia, see Stephen F. Cohen, "The New American Cold War," in *The Nation*, July 10, 2006.

19 V.I. Lenin, *Imperialism the Highest Stage of Capitalism*, Collected Works, v22, Moscow Progress Publishers, p302. Lenin argues the working class is split into two international camps, one on the side of communism, the other, because of the super-profits won from imperialism, on the side of its national bourgeoisie -- as evidenced by the entire history of the leadership of the AFL-CIO. Imperialism, however, was not just an advanced stage of capitalism; it was a source of the original capital, as Fredy Perlman has demonstrated in "The Continuing Appeal of Nationalism," available online at <<http://www.spunk.org/texts/pubs/ajoda/37/sp000787.txt>>. Perlman's analysis, on better historical ground, leads to more profound thinking about the splits in the working classes, though Perlman came to gloomy conclusions.

20 V.I Lenin, *What is to Be Done?* Collected Works (Moscow, 1961) 5:412.

21 R. Eyerman, *False Consciousness and Ideology in Marxist Thought*, p282-298.

22 V.I. Lenin (1915) "Opportunism, and the Collapse of the Second International," online at <<http://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1915/dec/x01.htm>>.

23 Davis, *Prisoners of the American Dream*, p76.

[24](#) Bill Gilbreth, now a Detroit teacher who lives in Southfield Michigan, has written about this incident in his self-published autobiography, only available through him. A good account is in Heather Ann Thompson, *Whose Detroit?* (2002) Cornell University Press, p200-203.

[25](#) On abandoning the strike as a weapon and concessions, see Mike Hudson and Mark Truby, "Dig in For Talks," *Lansing State Journal*, 9/4/03.

[26](#) The description of Reuther is largely drawn from Serrin's, *The Company and the Union*, but also from interviews with Marty Glaberman in 1998.

[27](#) C. Wright Mills describes the new labor leader in *The New Men of Power: America's Labor Leaders* (1948) as "craving for status and respect." He calls the new labor leaders, "whores of power." (p169)

[28](#) For the best short piece on the strike, see Walter Linder, "The Great Flint Sit Down Strike Against GM" (undated), online at <<http://www.rohan.sdsu.edu/~rgibson/flintstrike.html>>.

[29](#) Regarding the Reuthers and the CIA, see William Serrin (1970) *The Company and the Union*, Knopf, New York, p147. Material on the corralling of rank and file militancy just before, during, and after WWII, as well as on the GM strike of 1970, the charade, is from this book as well as Davis' *Prisoners of the American Dream*, Marty Glaberman's *Wartime Strikes*, and George Lipsitz's *Rainbow at Midnight*.

[30](#) See the "Battle of the Overpass," with photos and story, online at <<http://www.reuther.wayne.edu/exhibits/battle.html>>. And for an interesting sidelight on the Ford Hunger March, see <<http://www.forgottenshow.net/TheFordHunger.html>>.

[31](#) Billy Allen quoted in Roger Keeran (1980) *The Communist Party and the Auto Workers' Union*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, p220. I have, for this section, relied heavily on Keeran and George Lipsitz, *Rainbows at Midnight* as well as Mike Davis, *Prisoners of the American Dream*.

[32](#) Serrin, *The Company and the Union*, p131.

[33](#) Keeran, p242. Browder quoted on p246.

[34](#) For those who follow such things, the Little Flower is St. Theresa, patron saint of fascists world over. There are shrines of the Little Flower everywhere. In many cases, such as San Diego, the streets around the church are named after streets in her Lisieux, France, neighborhood. St. Theresa, who has the power of naming geography, has power. Theresa's philosophy of turning inward, blaming the poor for their own conditions, are cornerstones of fascist philosophy. India's favorite contemporary Mother Theresa, of course, chose her name after the saint. Every few years, the Catholic Church escorts what

they claim are St. Theresa's bones around the world. Tens of thousands of people come out to persevere. For an expansion, see *Hitler's Pope* by John Cornwell.

35 A longer treatment of the strike is in Keeran, *The Communist Party and the Auto Workers Union*, p266. In addition, for a mostly uncritical short take on the strike, and the part played by the CPUSA's United Electrical Workers Union, see [http://www.ranknfile\\_ue.org/uen\\_geraneo.html](http://www.ranknfile_ue.org/uen_geraneo.html).

36 See James Mattles and James Higgins, *Them and Us*, Beacon Press (1975) for what amounts to a CPUSA apologia, but a faithful description of Reuther.

37 See Robert Moses, *The Algebra Project*. The first half of the book is devoted to a fine history of the civil rights movement and is not only sharp on Reuther's betrayal, but also shows how foundation money diverted the movement from its initial goals. For a fine portrayal of life in the UAW for black autoworkers, see the fictional, but on-the-mark film, *Blue Collar*.

38 It is hard to choose, but of all US labor leaders, Shanker stands out as the worst. He was a leader of the League for Industrial Democracy and the Social Democrats USA, as well as the National Endowment for Democracy, all closely linked to the CIA. He earned his stripes by leading a racist strike in New York City, and the racist practices of the AFT have never ended. For extensions, see the work of Paul Buhle, "Albert Shanker: No Flowers," linked below, as well as R. Gibson, "Albert Shanker and the AFT," and Group Watch on Albert Shanker, the AFT and LID: <http://www.pipeline.com/~rgibson/SHANKER.htm>.

39 See the excellent PBS video, now hard to find, "Who Killed Vincent Chin?" Less than an hour long, it is a fine pedagogical tool when combined with a Chrysler bailout timeline, at <http://www.pipeline.com/~rgibson/VincentChinChrysler.htm>.

40 See Buzz Hargrove (1998) *Labor of Love: A Fight to Create a More Humane Canada*, Macfarlane, Stewart and Ross publishers, for a lengthy apologia for business unionism in the north country. Hargrove also offers an economic analysis of why it is the labor peace unions can offer employers is good for everyone.

41 For a summary of the errors of the Detroit Newspaper strike, see online <http://www.pipeline.com/%7Ergibson/IWWCHEST.html>. See also, Eric Chester, "The Detroit Newspaper Strike," in *The Industrial Worker*, 1997.

42 Online at <http://www.zazona.com/NewsArchive/2003%2007-25%20%20Alabama%20Firestorm%20over%20foreign%20workers.txt>.

43 On job losses, follow the references in the September 14, 2003 *Washington Post* article by Jonathon Weisman, online at <http://www.jobbankusa.com/News/Jobs/jobs91403b.html>.

[44](#) From *Plunkett of Tammany Hall* by William Riordan, p17.

[45](#) For disclosure, I spoke at the original *Labor Notes* conference in Detroit, still have friends associated with *LN*, though my disagreements with them have been clear since the opening speech. *Labor Notes*, which is online at <http://labornotes.org/index.shtml>, is dedicated to reform, not revolution, arguing in favor of the dues check off which is a key source of power for those who know they are the bitter enemies of *Labor Notes*, the UAW leadership.

[46](#) See *Solidarity for Sale* (2005) by Robert Fitch for the description of Carey and the role of modern-day Trotskyists in labor. Fitch is right that the labor movement is absolutely corrupt. Time after time, top labor leaders asked my friend, Tom Suber, and me (the two of us leaders in the state of Michigan union work force, able to cast votes that ruined AFSCME conventions, etc.), "What do you guys *really* want?" hinting that there was plenty available to make us happy. Initially, we just did not understand them, and they never understood our response, "we want to strike for real collective bargaining, to build a base to control our work places, to end welfare and state service cuts, to restore free health care in Detroit, etc." Fitch is wrong in thinking unions can be reformed by announcing reforms, or even by fighting for them. He should have asked, "why is it so crooked?"

[47](#) Hal Draper, "Marxism and the Trade Unions," online at <http://www.marxists.org/archive/draper/1970/tus/1-marx-tus.htm>.

[48](#) When John Sweeney was elected president of the AFL-CIO, at the same time he was promising the AFL-CIO will never abandon the Detroit Newspaper Strike," academics like Paul Buhle, pseudo-activist Bill Fletcher, and others formed the Scholars, Writers, Artists, and Activists for Social Justice, truly believing there was a "boomlet of labor hope that might have spurred a revived Democratic Party. . . ." (Buhle in *Monthly Review*, "The Legacy of the IWW," p15). The grouplet quickly fell apart as they, in shock, recoiled from the continued corruption of the AFL-CIO. Some later went so far as to insist they would vote for Ralph Nader, as a defiant stance to the Democrats. It may be that this Pollyannish view stems from the fact that ignorance, racism, opportunism, and cowardice characterize the bulk of the academic work force today, and that had its toll as so many of the SWAASJers were never out of academia. Or it may be that none of the founders of SWAASJ ever organized anything of significance and really have no understanding of what organizing action for social justice actually entails. Or, more likely, these profoundly mistaken tactics stem from deep flaws in the base analyses that these academics have offered to what they think of as the left in the US, for decades, wobbling when more radical analyses are vital.

[49](#) Fair disclosure: I was one of a handful of key leaders in the Welfare Employees Union and the State Workers Organizing Committee. I left state employment in 1985, went to work for the Michigan Education Association (sought to broker the affiliation with MEA) and left Michigan about a year before the move into the UAW. I have friends in UAW Local 6000, but few friends remaining among the leadership.