

## Counterfeit Unionism in the Empire

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With respect to nearly anyone who is trying to fight back in our current context, I differ from what most people think about the current state of US unionism.

Of course, none of that can be split away from an analysis of our current circumstances, which I believe is an international hot war, and economic war of the rich on the poor and the rapid emergence of fascism as a popular movement.

It does not have to be that way.

Let us hope that another scenario is possible if we take on the hard tasks of the immediate future. One of those tasks is to determine the role of the unions and the relationship of radicals to them.

Labor bosses at all levels are the nearest and most vulnerable of workers' enemies. Rather than “move unions to the left,” better, “demolish the labor quislings, take their treasuries, seize their buildings, as we build a mass class conscious movement to transcend the system of capital.”

Why does that make better sense?

Since the Industrial Workers of the World were nearly demolished in the Palmer Raids of 1919, American unionism has been a false flag operation: not what most people think of as unionism.

- Every major labor leader in the United States adopts the corporate-state view of unity of Labor Bosses, Government, and Corporations in the national interest. These are hardly “labor” unions in the strict sense of the word. They are the Empire's unions. I assume the connections of Labor and US intelligence are known and do not need to be explained. They are the unions of what now is, surely, the US Corporate State.
- It follows that the Labor Bosses deceive people from the moment they join a union, the key lie being that none of labor's elites believe that workers and employers have contradictory interests — the very reason most people agree to send them money.
- The remarkable salaries of US Labor Bosses (past National Education Association president Reg Weaver made \$696,949 in his last year in office) come directly from the fruits of US imperialism and war. They know that. They have been war hawks for decades, using the unions to promote the Empire's desires. They sit on the boards of the Social Democrats USA, the National Endowment for Democracy, The Albert Shanker Institute, The George Meany Center, and other fronts for the Central Intelligence Agency. Following the history of the American Federation of Labor, which sought to organize white men into craft (skill-based) unions, and exclude most of the working class, the international operations of the AFL-CIO seek to demolish indigenous workers' struggles so, in theory, American workers will do better. Clearly, this failed.

- Union tops trade a pacified or disciplined work force for money from employers. That is the nucleus of “collective bargaining.” Employers collect dues (check-off) on behalf of the union, send it to the union heads, while the labor tops promise labor peace for the duration of the contract. That is precisely the traditional exchange. Labor heads use violence to “protect the contract,” because employers can sue them if the rank and file wildcats, strikes within the contract’s time period. Henry Ford fought unions for years. When he finally came to understand this devil’s deal, he said, “You mean I’m the union’s banker? Sign me on!” Today, Ford management organizes Ford plants on behalf of the United Autoworkers Union. The upshot is, labor leaders: (1) condition the work force for passivity, (2) urge members to think of the union as a vending machine, and (3) consider the treasury, and thus mis-leaders own jobs and pensions, to be more important than the interest of the rank and file members—the union becomes a bank.
- When labor tops cry, “Save Collective Bargaining,” they really mean, “Save My Job and Pension!” The last 40 years of labor history show they are willing to concede everything the members have (wages, hours, working conditions, pensions) to management, often under the guise of “Save Our American Industry,” but what they really want is to preserve their money.
- The vast majority of unions are corrupt and hierarchical at the core, usually mimicking the structure of the employers. So, those seeking to reform those unions are not learning lessons to transcend capitalism, but rather they learn every opportunist and corrupt maneuver that has kept US “unionism” afloat when it should have been put to death years ago.
- So far this year, 2019, nine top United Auto Workers Union mis-leaders including the Vice President, have been convicted of taking bribes (in the millions) from the auto bosses and stealing from the national treasury. Speculation is that the federals chasing the hacks will soon indict the national president. Meanwhile, at a plush resort owned by the UAW, Black Lake, a past president is having a lovely home built for himself, with member dues. These same men and women, in October, rammed through a sellout contract at General Motors
- When one gets close to “reforming” a US union, one will face serious violence. That will come from not only the union bosses, but their allies in the courts, the cops, joint union/Boss firings, intelligence, and the mob — one or all. Those unprepared for that should, at the least, be forewarned.
- The unions accept without question the multiple divisions of labor that, in part, lay at the base of the capitalist system. The unions divide people far more than unite people. And each union’s structure mimics the structure of the management of their workplace.
- The “Labor Movement” is full of police, prison guards, and others dedicated to the promulgation of the violence that is the stick behind capital’s carrots (vanishing fast).
- Other labor unions are so mobbed up that it is impossible to distinguish the labor leaders from the gangsters — an indicator of the relationship of those who do crime, and the cops

who often help them organize it. In this case, the relationship has a third party, the members, who are thrice robbed: by the cops, by the gangsters, and by fetish that is their union, but is not a union.

- The last thing the Labor Movement and its aristocrats wants is a mass of class conscious workers who are willing to fight in solidarity to control their work places and communities. That would mean the Labor Bosses would have nothing to sell to the Big Bosses (labor peace/no strike clauses for check-off). Instead 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 Labor Movement is not about to teach people Grand Strategy (overcome capital), strategy (how to study concrete conditions about how capital works in specific places and make broad plans to fit the Grand Strategy) and tactics (sit-down strikes, mutinies, etc) not only because the Labor Movement bitterly opposes that, but also because there is nearly no one left in Labor who even knows how to fake it.
- The “Labor Movement” is not a movement and it is not where most people who work are. In fact, the overwhelming majority of people who are likely to be early change agents are not in unions: soldiers and students. To lure them into some bogus kind of US unionism, or nearly any other “unorganized” person, is to just add a layer of enemies for them. Why do that?
- Yes, some people are in unions and those who are serious about transforming capitalism need to be in those unions, attacking the leadership, the corruption, the hierarchies, the betrayals, the theft of treasuries, etc. But they need one toe in and nine out.
- A spate of wildcat strikes (opposed by both the labor bosses and Big bosses) broke out in the spring of 2018. Some made gains but the rank and file were easily led back into the hopeless electoral world where Americans choose who will oppress them best.
- Authorized strikes in 2019, by the Los Angeles school workers and others were quickly sold out, the members sent back to work with union promises unkept.
- 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 that, “The working class and the employing class have nothing in common,” applies to workers and their union leaders as well.
- Repeated efforts to reform “Labor” have either been silly like Aronowitz and others’ “Scholars, Artists and Writers for Social Justice,” etc, or simply failed, if pretty heroically: Labor Notes and the Teamsters.

The emergence of fascism will not mirror its predecessor movements in precise ways. However, if as that process deepens, the US union offices would be where people would be instructed to pick up their brown-shirts.

It is well past time to get beyond the genteel idea that Richard Trumka, the picture of narcissism, is going to be “moved left,” or voted out of office, just as it is well beyond the time to grasp what capitalist democracy is: capital trumping whatever democracy may be at every turn today.

I am sincerely sorry UAW members have not yet assaulted Solidarity [*sic*] House, thrown the vile leaders of the UAW in the Detroit River, grabbed membership lists, needed machinery, and whatever of the treasury they can, and either fled or held the building as long as possible while reinforcements have a chance to arrive to fend off the UAW’s goon/staff a la their action at the Detroit Mack Avenue plant in 1973.

I am sorry workers have not stormed podiums, grabbed mikes, slugged the labor hacks, and made speeches to their co-workers about what a real workers’ organization would look like (see Paris Commune for starters).

I am sorry there have not been more wildcats like the Detroit Teachers Wildcat Strike.<sup>1</sup>

Harsh, harsh measures to those union hacks who seek to foist concessions on the rank and file when 40 years of labor history show that concessions do not save jobs. Like feeding blood to sharks, concessions only make employers want more. Harsh measures.

I look forward to all of that happening, and more, and I think it will.

The core issue of our times is the rise of color-coded inequality and the real promise of perpetual war met by the potential of mass class-conscious resistance.

At issue is connecting reason to power.

So far, the education agenda is a war agenda.<sup>2</sup>

#### Author

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<sup>1</sup> Gibson, R. (1999). The theory and practice of constructing hope: The Detroit Teachers’ wildcat strike 1999. *Cultural Logic*, 4. Retrieved from <https://ojs.library.ubc.ca/index.php/clogic/article/view/192193>

<sup>2</sup> Gibson, R., & Ross, E. W. (2009). The education agenda is a war agenda: Connecting reason to power and power to resistance. *Workplace: A Journal for Academic Labor*, 29, 31-52. Retrieved from <https://ices.library.ubc.ca/index.php/workplace/article/view/182226>



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