

PL Gangster Attacks in River Rouge

Militants Fight for Program in UAW Unemployment Committee

DETROIT—Unemployment lines here grow longer daily as the continuing collapse of production at auto's "Big Three" spreads to related and service industries. The city's largest single employer, Chrysler, recently reported its greatest net losses in history for both the fourth quarter and all of 1974 (*New York Times*, 18 February). According to industry sources, at its current depletion rate the Chrysler SUB (Supplemental Unemployment Benefits) fund will be exhausted by the end of March (*Detroit News*, 12 February). In spite of this and ignoring the crying need for union organization of the unemployed to fight for jobs and increased benefits, the United Auto Workers' Solidarity House has actively opposed the establishment of local and regional unemployment committees.

One of the few UAW committees to emerge with actual membership participation is the Unemployment Committee (UC) of the Dearborn Assembly plant at Ford's River Rouge complex (Local 600). Much of the left press credits this to "progressive" DAP unit chairman Hank Wilson. However, in recent interviews with Unemployment Committee members *WV* learned that, in fact, the creation of the UC represented Wilson's frightened response to independent initiative from the ranks. In the week before the first massive layoff on November 15, Wilson reportedly had to be pressured into even calling a union meeting, the first since August!

Ten militants in the unit had signed and distributed a leaflet urging DAP workers to turn out for the meeting and vote for union-wide action against layoffs. Their leaflet called for the creation of union unemployment committees and the election of a special body to mobilize throughout the UAW for reopening the contract to win jobs for all through a shorter workweek with no loss in pay, opening the company's books, full cost-of-living protection and other key demands.

At the meeting, the "progressive" unit chairman reportedly ruled this motion out of order, repeatedly interrupting and cutting off the speaker. This came after Wilson had spent 30 minutes of his president's report waving the leaflet about while decrying "outsiders" and "communism"! Wilson then announced he had appointed about ten unit officers and committeemen to an Unemployment Committee. Workers at the meeting said none of the appointees had ever heard of the committee before that!

(Such bureaucratic high-handedness and red-baiting are the stock-in-trade of labor fakers who support the present capitalist system, as Wilson does. In a telephone interview he told *WV*: "I think we can improve the system we have.... The system is failing now, there's no question about that, but there's so much room for improvement.")

Program for Victory or Reformist Antics?

The UC did not go quite the way Wilson had planned. Most of his appointees have reportedly boycotted the committee, orienting to an anti-Wilson electoral bloc for the upcoming spring unit elections. A number of workers sympathetic to the views of various

left groups have, however, participated. Most have been more than willing to go along with Wilson's desire to use the Unemployment Committee as a sounding board for his own re-election plans, at the expense of raising the necessary political answers to company layoffs and the strangulation of the union by the Woodcock machine.

Nevertheless, the DAP workers who had drawn Wilson's fire at the November meeting, principally Jerry Harris and Keith Dodds, joined the committee to fight for a strategy to meet the industry/government offensive. In an interview, Harris explained that a proposal submitted by him and several other militants not only answered the immediate problems facing auto workers but also pointed to their fundamental solutions.

Among the points included in this program were: jobs for all through a shorter workweek at no loss in pay and massive union-controlled public works; increased unemployment/SUB benefits for the duration of layoff; a fight against the special oppression of women and minorities; a fight for full citizenship rights for foreign workers (particularly important to Detroit's many Arab auto workers); international workers solidarity against economic protectionism and imperialist wars; workers control of a nationalized auto industry (no compensation to the owners); and a break with the backstabbing Democrats to build a workers party.

These militants also took the lead in advocating a tactic that could reverse the union's complete passivity in the face of permanent layoffs which have hit more than a third of auto production workers: the sitdown strike. At the January 25 DAP unit meeting, the day after another 500 workers were sacked, Dodds put forward two motions, one calling for nationwide UAW sitdown strikes against layoffs and the other mandating a sitdown demonstration in the plant to protest the layoffs which have already cost over 2,000 Dearborn Assembly workers their jobs. Wilson's behavior was the same as in November, continually interrupting the speaker and finally ruling his motion out of order.

The clash in the UC and at union meetings between Wilson's reformism and class-struggle politics has seen the supporters of several left groups repeatedly side with Wilson or else "lie low," providing no leadership in the fight against unemployment. Those who sympathize with the Communist Party repeatedly declare their support for Wilson and Mayor Coleman Young. Others who support the views of the Communist Labor Party have had nothing more to propose than a Christmas party to raise money for the unemployed (!) and sending a letter to other UAW locals notifying them of the UC's existence.

PL Race-Baiting and Red-Baiting

By far the most grovelling performance, however, has been by supporters of the Progressive Labor Party. With originally only one committee member sympathetic to their politics, himself a member of the motley hodgepodge called United Trade Unionists (UTU), ever increasing numbers of PL supporters simply started attending

and voting at UC meetings, despite the fact that none of them were employed or laid off from the DAP! When this was objected to, PL's newspaper *Challenge* (30 January) stooped to a new low in gross red-baiting and race-baiting. Describing its opponents as "racist swine," PL whined:

"...there is an organized right wing of the Maoist Revolutionary Union, Trotskyite Sparticus [*sic*] League and sell-out "Communist" Party members. They have done everything in their power to side-track discussion."

Evidently sentiment against the PL supporters' obviously undemocratic maneuver was somewhat more widespread than *Challenge* implies, as a recent UC meeting voted overwhelmingly to restrict voting rights to employed and laid-off workers from DAP. Only two voted against, the UTUer and a PL supporter who has never worked at Dearborn Assembly.

PL is well aware that the UAW bureaucracy has used its red clause to purge militants from the union's ranks before. By attempting to finger workers as "members" of "outside" organizations, PL aids the companies and the anti-communist UAW tops. Aware that red-baiting can be used against them too, and having seen Hank Wilson's proficiency in this area, PL supporters have *not once* put forward or fought for positions Wilson disagreed with.

Nor have they objected when Wilson altered the minimal program of the UC, going so far as to add to it, in one of his "Ford Facts" columns, a call for wage controls! They have never mentioned Wilson's support of the entire Woodcock slate at the 1974 UAW convention, nor his support for the "entire Democratic ticket" in the fall elections. In UC meetings they have labelled DAP workers who dared to oppose Wilson as "snakes"!

Stalinist Gangsterism

It is PL's cowardly unwillingness (in fact, its inability) to distinguish itself from Wilson's craven reformism that has made it grow more and more shrill in denouncing those who do fight for class-struggle policies. The 15 February *Challenge* shrieks:

"Also if the racist Trotskyites think that they will go on sabotaging and disrupting our committee and local, and setting up our leaders for attack, they too are dead wrong. We in PLP have been very patient in struggling against their racist dribble. They have exposed themselves to all as representing no one but themselves. We will no longer tolerate these self-centered, boss-serving saboteurs. They have been politically isolated and must now be physically defeated."

PL supporters have already begun to act out these hooligan fantasies. They began by threatening to "kick ass" on various Unemployment Committee members during UC meetings. Then at the January 25 union meeting the UTUer was not content with chanting along with right-wing bureaucrats "no support, no support" in response to Dodds' sitdown proposals; nor with

applauding wildly when one committeeman suggested removing Dodds and Harris from the UC for leafletting the plant advocating sitdowns (only six weeks earlier this same UTUer had done the same). Almost immediately after the meeting concluded this two-bit would-be thug lunged across a table to assault Dodds and had to be dragged off by other workers, who immediately leaped to the militants' defense.

An even more serious provocation occurred recently in the plant itself. During a break, three PL supporters, none of whom work in the building, cornered a worker who had frequently supported the militant perspectives of Dodds and Harris in UC meetings. They tried to provoke a fight with full knowledge that the worker could be instantly fired for fighting on company property. This militant told *WV* that the thugs started to push him around in an aisle bordered on both sides by boxes of stock. Only because he managed to move into sight of the other workers on the line was a bloody incident averted. The Stalinists finally left muttering threats of further violence.

Reformists are driven to such frenzy by the class-struggle politics which expose their subservient alliance with sellout bureaucrats. While they may curry favor with a temporary ally (who will turn on them later with the same methods they are now using), the PLers' thuggery and opportunism cannot build a working-class movement that will put an end to unemployment and overthrow capitalism. Those union militants in the DAP Unemployment Committee who have been advancing a class-struggle program hold the key to unlocking the bureaucratic chains that bind the UAW to the class enemy. ■

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Ford's River Rouge complex in Detroit.

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