

# DETROIT REVOLUTIONARY MOVEMENT RECORDS

BOX 14 OF 16

FOLDER 2

UNEMPLOYMENT CAMPAIGN  
CRITICISM BY SPARTACIST  
LEAGUE 1975

[1-1975]

THE STRUGGLE AGAINST CAPITALIST UNEMPLOYMENT  
AND THE POLITICS OF THE COMMUNIST LABOR PARTY

Today's Common Council hearing takes place in the context of a deepening international capitalist economic crisis that has caused massive unemployment and inflation, intensifying trade war and threats by both Kissinger and Ford of war against the Arab OPEC countries. The Spartacist League declares that only the construction of a workers' movement freed from the grip of today's labor misleaders, led by a revolutionary vanguard party and dedicated to socialism, will be capable of resolving this crisis in favor of the exploited masses.

There are others who take a different approach. The Communist Labor Party and its various front groups, who have played a prominent role in building today's meeting, are among these, and therefore deserve the attention of those interested in a serious struggle against unemployment.

FROM THE COMMUNIST LEAGUE TO THE COMMUNIST LABOR PARTY: FROM "LEFTIST" RHETORIC TO REFORMISM

Within the spectrum of Stalinist Mao-loyal politics, the CLP (which was founded some months ago by the Communist League and its camp followers) has a history of a certain "leftism." Noting the obvious opportunism of such Maoist groups as the Revolutionary Union and October League, the CL/CLP's People's Tribune has long been full of lefty sounding articles. What was always noticeably absent was any relationship drawn between these lofty goals and the on-going struggles of the proletariat: i.e., what program the CL proposed to link up its declarations with the day-to-day struggles of the workers. This was not accidental, nor simply an "absence" in the CL's perspectives, but an indication of the Stalinist resurrection of the old social-democratic "minimum/maximum" program which serves up reform struggles as the grist of today's activities, while making more or less often declarations for socialism...someday. Only the CL's self-imposed restrained activity in the past (study groups and the like) has prevented a more public display of its inevitably reformist thrust. The formation of the CLP, and its subsequent turn to "mass work" has, however, demonstrated this in full.

KEEPING THE STRUGGLE "WHERE IT IS AT"

The September People's Tribune (now organ of the CLP) contained an announcement of a "National Campaign" to "Fight for Jobs":

"There is no use making the call for socialism in an abstract manner."

"...the Party can best develop this campaign by entering the struggle where it is at, and while constantly organizing and consolidating it, involving larger and larger sections of the working class, thereby raising the struggle to a higher level."

In the October People's Tribune we are treated to the CLP "program" which consists, as we anticipated, of statements "for socialism" and a laundry list of reform demands with the illuminating note:

"Only through the revolutionary struggle for reforms can the proletariat be organized to establish its dictatorship."

If this were indeed the "only" way, the proletariat would be beheaded at every turn! The CLP, by addition of the adjective "revolutionary" to the "struggle for reforms" reduces the distinction between reformist and revolutionary politics to a matter of style and mannerism. The revisionists presumably struggle for reforms in a "reformist" way, while the CLP will struggle in a "revolutionary" way, by "entering the struggle where it is at" and "organizing, consolidating" and "involving larger and larger sections of the working class." Hence the "raising of the level of struggle" is conceived in purely organizational and quantitative terms.

But large size and strength of organization does not make a revolutionary movement. There can be, and have been, large well-organized reformist movements (the late 1930's CPUSA or the French CP today). The CLP misses the whole point, the essence of Lenin's teachings on the party, of injecting a revolutionary class struggle program into today's struggles. For the CLP, Marxism-Leninism remains at the level of theory; its practice is, by necessity, reformist. The concrete expressions of this are not difficult to find.

The CLP, and its front groups, have focused much attention on, and called for "full implementation" of, the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act of 1973, which provides federal funds to create jobs in high unemployment areas. Instead of exposing this bourgeois hoax, the CLP has tried to play it up. But the CETA is not dissimilar to most laws in its statement of grandiose intentions (see the 1946 Full Employment Act for even more categorical promises of "jobs for all"). What the CLP has not said is that the CETA at full funding provided for only 2,520 jobs for Detroiters (Detroit News, 1 January 1975). Even the recent 1974 Special Employment Assistance Act will provide for only a measly 100,000 jobs--to be distributed among the over 6.5 million "official" unemployed! Such miserly crumbs from the capitalist table must be exposed by revolutionaries--not built up as "weapons" (as the CLP labeled the CETA) in the hands of the workers. Our task is to fight for JOBS FOR ALL!

The CLP's appeals to Young and the Common Council to "implement" this program are equally misleading. Aaron Pitts, spokesman for the Workers Action Coalition for Jobs before the Common Council previously, was quoted in the Free Press, "I don't know why Mayor Young and the council don't ask for more," referring to federal job funds. The CLP seeks to "pressure" Young and the Council to "pressure" the federal government, without exposing bourgeois politicians, from Young to Ford, as agents of the class enemy. The CLP capitulates to illusions in the Detroit black population in Young, instead of exposing his real actions: hiring more cops, establishing new police mini-stations, trying to put cops in the

schools, laying off city workers. Jobs will be gained by the independent workers' struggle against Young and Common Council, not through "pressuring" it to "pressure" someone else!

The CLP calls for funding of CETA jobs through cutting defense spending. Revolutionaries of course oppose imperialism's military budget. But to simply pose this source for federal expenditures is perfectly consistent with the liberal wing of the Democratic Party, which raises the same argument. Marx's statement in the Communist Manifesto that communists "...bring to the front, as the leading question in each case, the property question, no matter what its degree of development at the time" is foreign to the CLP. Instead of calling for the expropriation of industry with no compensation, as the SL does, the CLP links arms ideologically with the McGoverns and Proxmires to rearrange the capitalists' budget priorities, in keeping with "entering the struggle where it is at."

The CLP's turn to active work around unemployment in the auto plants suffers from the same inability to go beyond the "minimum program." The CLP, and RUM groups influenced by it, have called for Unemployment Committees, which the UAW should indeed have. But to pose form without substance, organizational measures without a program capable of dealing with capitalist unemployment, is not revolutionary trade union work.

JARUM vol. 2, no. 3 outlines the tasks it proposes for Unemployment Committees: to get the unemployed all compensation, food stamps, welfare, legal aid they are entitled to; insure monthly bulletins; pressure city council and state legislature, prevent management from scheduling overtime, etc. etc. Many reform demands are listed ... but absolutely nothing that goes beyond reforms!

Even worse is a petition being distributed in Cadillac, Local 22 that bears a striking resemblance to the CLP's politics. Calling for the standard action by Mayor Young and Council to take immediate action to enforce "full implementation" of the CETA, it also states, "we demand that the UAW set up an emergency unemployment fund ... to be funded by individual and corporate contributions and other fund-raising methods." Not even demands on the state! This is a return to Salvation Army type self-help schemes! This petition also calls for immediate UAW-CAP action "to reduce the fourteen weeks it takes to qualify for unemployment to six weeks..." How "reasonable"! Only six weeks instead of fourteen!

To bring together its various efforts, the CLP has been instrumental in establishing the "Detroit Unemployed Council." A leaflet for an Open House at its office includes demands for implementation and expansion of CETA, for MESC checks to be mailed to the unemployed, end to eviction and repossession for unemployed and increase in availability of food stamps. These demands are it... none even verge on going beyond where "the struggle is at."

THE REVOLUTIONARY APPROACH: THE SPARTACIST LEAGUE

Despite whatever good intentions, the CLP is stuck in the mire of reformist politics because it cannot transcend the minimum/maximum program. Like the labor bureaucracy, the CLP thus is incapable of putting forward a fighting anti-capitalist strategy to reverse the mounting tide of layoffs, and instead offers up a myriad of band-aid reforms, dealing with the results of the problem, not its cause. The Spartacist League on the other hand bases itself on the experience of the Russian Revolution and the early work of the Communist International in its first four congresses, and the lessons of this work codified in Trotsky's Transitional Program: a program that fights for the day-to-day needs of the workers, but advances demands that in struggle bridge the gap between these day-to-day needs and the socialist revolution. This in fact was the approach of the C.I.

"...the alternative offered by the Communist International in place of the minimum program of the reformists and centrists is the struggle for the concrete needs of the proletariat and demands, which in their application, undermine the power of the bourgeoisie, organize the proletariat, form the transition to proletarian dictatorship, even if the latter have not yet grasped the meaning of such proletarian dictatorship."

(All underlined in original; Theses on Tactics, #3 CI, 1921.)

It is only in this way that the gap between the "minimum" program of reform and the maximum, socialist revolution, can be bridged, or has been bridged in the history of the communist movement. The pursuit of this approach avoids the "hip-pocket" socialism of the Stalinists and Maoists, where the demands for revolution are kept tucked away for another day, while the struggle for reforms proceeds.

Communists struggle side by side with the workers, where they are at, for the necessities of life. But we seek not simply to be the best organizers or most militant strugglers for today's reforms, but to inject into these struggles a program of demands that both incorporates the valid and vital immediate demands and goes beyond them to point to the fundamental cause of the workers' problems, the capitalist system.

Thus in applying the Transitional Program to the current problems and conditions, particularly those of the mushrooming legion of unemployed, the Spartacist League has raised demands for jobs for all through the shortening of the work week with no loss in pay; massive public works at union scale under the control of the trade unions; full cost-of-living raises in all contracts (sliding scale of wages) and for those on relief; unconditional, unlimited unemployment compensation, free social services for all, pegged to the real cost of living. All are demands that address the proletariats' immediate needs. But at every opportunity we seek to intervene in the on-going struggle with a program that cuts at the heart of capitalist production, that raises the question of property ownership and political power.

For instance, when Chrysler Corporation was threatening to close Jefferson Assembly, the SL distributed leaflets, held public meetings and forums, to advance the necessary solutions to the Jefferson workers' plight while the CLP and JARUM held church revival meetings and came forward to clasp hands and pray with Jesse Jackson, never once advancing either demands or tactics that would lead the Jefferson workers in struggle. We called for the militant tactic of sitdown strikes, backed up by the entire UAW and labor movement, to bring forward the following: open the books to workers' inspection, build factory committees to supervise factory seizure and introduce workers' control of production, demand the expropriation of the private owners without compensation. Realizing these demands will not be implemented by the good will of Gerald Ford, the SL also called for the trade unions to break with the Democrats, and the construction of a workers' party, linking the demand for expropriation with the necessity of planning of production under a workers' government.

Since the CL has so often prated about the necessity of building the "multi-national vanguard party," it is notable that in all the material for "mass consumption," no political alternative is offered to the Democrats and Republicans.

Power is still in the factories. The tactic of the sitdown strike, based on a program challenging the ownership of the industry, is in this period the most powerful weapon available to the autoworkers. Yet the CLP has conspicuously avoided even mentioning the possibility of such actions and has offered no alternatives for the mobilization of the workers. Thus the CLP leaves the workers disarmed in face of the labor bureaucracy (which remains the key obstacle to mass labor action) when it says "nothing can be done."

The approach of revolutionaries, carried out today by the Spartacist League and the Spartacus Youth League, is not a sure fire guarantee of instant popularity. The ranks are shackled by rotten misleadership, fearful of the future, split by racial animosities. But the building of a revolutionary movement must combine tactical flexibility with the firm adherence to revolutionary principles and program. Those in the ranks of the Communist Labor Party who seek the road of class struggle must examine the program and practice of the revolutionary Trotskyists: the Spartacist League and its youth section, the SYL.

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