

# THE BLACK VOICE

VOL.5 NO.2

PUBLISHED BY  
UNITED BLACK WORKERS  
FORD MAHWAH PLANTATION  
AND  
NEWARK, N.J

UNITE



A  
Call  
to an  
International  
Worker's Day  
Rally

May 1  
Tompkins  
Square Park  
New York City

*There is no force, however  
formidable, that a united  
People cannot overcome.*

MARCH!

MARCH!

MARCH!

March to begin from Straus Park  
Lower East Side

We here by state that as oppressed workers here at the Mahwah Plantation (Ford Plant) we are not bound by any constitution, contracts, agreements, known or unknown, by-laws or company policies agreed upon by management and the U.A.W. that are racist or tend to deprive Black, Third World and all oppressed workers of their basic constitutional and moral rights. These rights being human dignity, health and safety, better working conditions, and equal job opportunities.

We further state it is our right as workers to demand that both labor and management make use of large portions of the monies gained from our labors to improve the living, educational and health conditions in our communities with no strings attached.

To obtain these rights the U.B.W. are committed to organize, agitate, expose, inform and use all means at our disposal, not settling for anything short of victory.

We further state that we are not bound to respect, obey or follow the leadership of any plant manager, supervisor, union official or any other underlings who negate any claim they might have for these rights when they place personal ambition self interest, profit and property rights over the human rights of workers.

The factories belong to the people and we workers are the people.

1. End of Ford Motor Company paying union officials' salaries.
2. End of racism, exploitation and oppression of all workers.
3. Transportation provided for workers who must travel long distances back and forth to work. Many cannot afford to buy a car and must depend upon car pools.
4. Waiver of 90 day eligibility for Viet Nam veterans. Make them eligible as of the first day on the job.
5. A complete revision of grievance procedures.
6. Mandatory medical check up every three months for all workers who paint, spray, grind lead or metal, welders, drivers and all workers who are exposed to the deadly pollution which fills the air throughout this plant.
7. End of compulsory overtime.
8. End of line speed-up.
9. End of white skin privilege.
10. Mandatory printing in Spanish and Creole of all bulletins, pamphlets and job applications put out by Ford Motor Company and the U.A.W.
11. To get more Black and Third World workers into skilled trades many already qualify but racism is keeping them out. A strong and effective apprenticeship program to prepare young Black and Third World workers for skilled trades.
12. Mandatory English classes in plant for non-English speaking or reading workers.
13. Ford Motor Company to announce a policy of complete disengagement from South Africa since all Americans doing business in South Africa reinforce that racist system and its government.

## THE BLACK VOICE

The Black Voice is the information arm of the United Black Workers, an organization of workers at the Ford Mahwah Assembly Plantation, Mahwah, New Jersey. Thanks to the efforts of our members, friends and supporters, The United Black Workers offers The Black Voice as an alternative answer to the New York Daily News, Playboy Magazine or other types of similar reading material workers are forced to read.

The Black Voice was started in 1970. Its purpose, to help educate, expose, inform and even agitate our fellow workers out of a feeling of complacency and frustration. Its further purpose is to assist in dealing realistically with the many problems facing workers on the job, in the community, country and around the world.

### NATURAL MAN

*"I don't want no gold watch  
for working fifty years from nine to five  
While the boss is guzzlin' champagne  
and I'm beltin' beer in some dive  
'Cause I want to be  
happy and free  
livin' and lovin' for me  
like a natural man . . .*

(sung by Lou Rawls;  
song by Bobby Hebb and Sandy Baron)

We do not profess to be experienced newspapermen and women. We have no degrees in the fields of journalism or printing. We do have a serious commitment to reach, unify and struggle with the working class of men and women wherever they may be. We do see the need for communication for and about workers and their many problems. These problems are daily problems. These problems are not isolated, they affect us all.

The United Black Workers and the Black Voice has dedicated itself to this important task.



LOCAL 906 U.A.W. NEEDS A  
REVOLUTION .....

Fellow workers here on the Mahwah Plantation, and members of Local 906, U.A.W.; the United Black Workers ask you this question. . . How Much Longer? How much longer are you going to put up with the lack of local union leadership?

How much longer are you going to sit quietly by and endure racism, exploitation, and oppression by Ford Motor Company, with no response (good or bad) from Local 906?

How much longer are we going to be pitted against each other; old against young, white against black, and men against women?

How much longer are we going to do nothing while our fellow workers are being harrassed and deported as the phoney reason for the loss of jobs?

How much longer are we going to continue paying union dues while getting nothing in return for our hard earned money?

How much longer are we going to put up with non-functioning committee like F.P.C. (Fair Practice Committee) that do nothing but rip off our money?

We could go on and on and the question would still remain. . . .

How Much Longer?  
These Are Hard Times

Brothers and Sisters you are all aware that these are hard times for us all. There is no leadership coming from elected officials in Washington, D.C., or state and local



officials. There is even less leadership coming from our U.A.W. officials, from Woodcock and Martin Gerber, (Region 9 Director), to our own local president, Joe Rielly.

The crisis for us here at Mahwah and in Local 906 did not just begin this year, as most of you know. We have been suffering for the past two years. First with the so-called energy crisis when over 3500 of us were laid off. Those of us lucky enough to keep working, had to put up with faster line speeds, frightened foremen, (afraid of losing their jobs), long gas lines, and being penalized by Ford Motor Company when we arrived late to work after standing in long lines for hours.

During this time, our local officials did nothing but blow hot air and promise us things would get better in 1975 because Mahwah was getting a new car (Granada) to build.

The new year came, the new car came, but nothing changed. Instead, it got worse. We did lose Nixon and Agnew, but we still have Rielly and his gang.

What Can We Do?

During the last contract, our local officials pushed through an extension

for their term in office from two to three years. That is all they have done.

How many of these so-called leaders had to stand in long unemployment lines, or fight to get food stamps and a welfare check? How many have been threatened with having their gas and electric turned off, and goods repossessed? Instead of offering assistance, they laugh when they hear of a fellow worker in trouble and say, "tough luck."

U.B.W. says its time to put an end to this bullshit. While we suffer, they get fat. Check them out if you are lucky enough to catch one around. You know how they can disappear.

We cannot afford to wait two years (1976) before we begin to act. We must move NOW ! In two years they will be around like bees to honey with promises, promises, promises. We need action, action, action, and correct leadership. If they don't want to provide that leadership and offer concrete services, then we must get rid of them once and for all.

We must hold them accountable for their actions or inaction. They will continue to do nothing as long as we do and say nothing.

Not only are our jobs and the jobs of our fellow workers at stake, but our lives, our families, our health, and our self-respect are also at stake. If we do not demand respect and to be treated with human dignity, we won't get it. We only have ourselves to blame.

Things are going to get worse in this country and on our jobs. We must begin now to fight back; later might be too late.

Many of us are deeply concerned about what is happening at home and around the world. Such as the liberation struggles in Puerto Rico, Latin America, Africa, Viet Nam, and Cambodia. We are concerned about stepped-up police brutality, day care, housing, bussing, rascism, and the struggles of women.

Local 906 has not taken any position on any of these important topics. All of these areas affect us in some way as blacks, whites, workers, men, women, or taxpayers. By ignoring these issues, they will not go away.

### It's Not My Job

Our local 906 officials seem to be telling us that they are not concerned or interested in our problems.

"It's not my job." We are





## HARD TIMES CONFERENCE

On February 28, 1975, the United Black Workers participated in a two-day community meeting at Laney College, Oakland California. The meeting was titled "Hard Times and the Economic Crisis." This event was sponsored by over 25 organizations within the Bay area, including students and professors from Laney College and the Hard Times Coalition. The Hard Times Coalition is a study group of primarily independent, progressive men and women whose constant hard work, sacrifice, and commitment to this event, as well as their concern for their community during this economic crisis, made it all possible.

There are some criticisms, as is to be expected. However, this was their first attempt at sponsoring such a large program. U.B.W. feels that the two-day program, forum and workshops were spirited and seemingly well run. The hospitality shown us was beautiful and in the spirit of true comradeship, for which we thank all concerned.

The criticisms, though few, are important. The major one being the inability to attract the participation of Third World students of Laney College and the Bay area Third World. The



other being too many speakers (four) on the opening night. This made the program run too long. Many in the audience became restless. Some even left before the last two speakers had spoken.

We hope the Hard Times Coalition will sponsor more projects like this one. Also, we are sure the Coalition has learned much from this experience and will work towards correcting these problems.

On the positive side, the conference was well attended. The present economic crisis was analyzed and put forth clearly by all speakers. It was more a teach-in than a conference. A further positive step was the keeping out of the many sectarian left organizations who would rather disrupt a meeting than collectively participate for the betterment of all.

U.B.W. enjoyed participating in the Hard Times Conference, we enjoyed meeting new friends and comrades on the west coast. Most important, we established communication with our comrades in struggle.

Most of the time, those of us here on the east coast are unaware or misinformed of the important work going on in other parts of the country.

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## A VISIT WITH THE BLACK PANTHER PARTY

By Wilbur Haddock  
Central Staff  
UNITED BLACK WORKERS



David G. Du Bois



Elaine Brown

One of the highlights of my trip to the West Coast was a visit with the beautiful brothers and sisters of the Oakland-based Black Panther Party, including visits to their many community projects. The Oakland Panthers sponsor a free Health Clinic, Restaurant and Bar, Office and Print Shop, Intercommunal Youth Institute, and campaign headquarters of Elaine Brown who is running for city council in Oakland, California.

Due to the lack of communication, distorted media coverage, misinformation from east coast Panthers, concerning many areas including recent happenings within the party, I was most anxious to meet with and hopefully share experiences and learn from each other, as well as learn the truth. These are some of the things that are lacking among many movement groups these days.

### Just Like Coming Back Home

To my surprise and gratification, meeting with these comrades was just like, as we used to say, "coming back home." There were no visible signs of pain or anguish from the years of police and government harrassment, brutality and defection, organizational and tactical mistakes which all revolutionaries make in their growth process.

Instead, I found warmth, love, pride and dedication to the Party and its many on-going programs. It was like coming back home because I felt like a member of the family, coming back to my roots. Many of us have gotten away from this in recent years. I could relate to, and sense the closeness of our joint struggles. The history of worker's struggles, like the Black Panther Party in this country, has been filled with death, blood, brutality, sell-outs, etc. The United Black Workers too, have had their share of experiences with the CIA, FBI, Internal Revenue Service, Ford Motor Company, UAW, local and state police over the years. For that alone, we would have grounds for solidarity.

### A Lesson To Be Learned

Throughout my visit, one thought kept running through my mind. Here was a lesson to be learned by many of us within the movement. Especially the Black Liberation Movement across this country, and in the east particularly.

We have tasted few victories, seen little consistency, produced few concrete alternatives for the masses. Not counting the cultural centers, dance groups, Kwanza celebrations and the bertha butt boogie. What have we really offered the young, old, tenants, welfare recipients, prisoners, or workers? What leadership have we really given them? What have we built and shared with them that they could touch, feel, and be a collective part of?



What have we established in our communities that the masses can be proud of, relate to, or speak with pride about to their friends and loved ones ? Not much, I'm afraid.

In Oakland, I saw very much what the BPP had done and contributed. I talked with students, teachers, doctors, community residents, party members, campaigning volunteers, bartenders, waitresses, and businessmen. All spoke with pride and support of the BPP and its survival programs. All were committed to the success and continued growth of the BPP. Isn't that what it's all about ?

### A Rewarding Trip

My eyes were opened to the truth and commitment of these comrades as they wage the protracted struggle against a common enemy.

It was rewarding talking to comrades Erica Huggins and her staff at the Intercommunal Youth Institute. Providing not only quality education for our young, but programs for our seniors. A place for the teenagers to meet and display their talents. Something badly needed in east Oakland. The doctors and staff at the free medical clinic were testing for sickle cell and hypertension. Many talk about programs such as these, but few achieve.

Talking to the bloods and beautiful sisters at the Lampost Bar and Restaurant; believe me, the food there is Dyno-Mite ! Meeting the many volunteers at Elaine Brown's headquarters. It reminds me of the days (1970), when U.B.W. was involved in the campaign to elect Kenneth Gibson, the first black mayor of Newark, and all the excitement that surrounded the election.

Because of our early flight back, my meeting with sister Elaine Brown had to be cancelled. However, I wished her, on behalf of the U.B.W., success and victory in her upcoming election to the city council. With continued support like she was getting daily while I was there, victory is certain without a doubt.

Finally, to my friend, guide, and comrade Brother David G. DuBois, editor of the BPP newspaper, and official spokesman for the Party, I can only say thanks for making me feel at home.

Brother DuBois has a huge weight to carry on his shoulders. From what I could see, he is dealing with it and growing everyday. With the collective support of the other members of the Party, combined with those of us from the outside offering our support and solidarity, his task will be a little lightened.

In the short time DuBois has been involved with the Party, he has gained the respect of many in California. Struggling to live up to the responsibilities of a famous name and family has only heightened his determination and commitment. Although he has not asked for it, I think we owe him and others like him a vote of confidence and our hand in support and solidarity. We often take each other for granted and as a result, we lose many comrades along the way. It is time to let them know what we think of their sacrifice, work, commitment, and contribution. This gives them the confidence and strength to

keep on trucking. Isn't that what we comrades are suppose to be about ?

### How We Can Help

I do not mean to imply that the Panthers are without their problems. We all have them. They admit they have made some mistakes, again haven't we all. More importantly, the contributions the BPP have made to the Black Liberation Struggle in particular and the overall struggles of oppressed peoples is a historic fact. As one community brother told me as he praised Huey Newton, "Before Huey and the Black Panther Party, noone ever heard of Oakland, California. They put us on the map." I bet some of you thought Charles Finley and the Oakland A's did that. Huey Newton is more popular in Oakland than Reggie Jackson could ever be.

Too often we have sat by and watched struggling programs, schools and newspapers dedicated to the people and our community just fade away and die. We have the responsibility to support, strengthen and continue their work.

Disagree with the BPP if you must, but still support their programs. The destruction of the BPP's programs and its newspaper would be a victory for the enemy and a heavy set-back for the movement. All over the world, people still look to the Party for leadership, information, and strength.

The persecution of the Party and its members still goes on and will continue to go on as long as we remain silent. If we don't give a dam, the enemies of, not just the party, but all oppressed peoples, will feel free to continue committing genocide on the BPP and its programs for survival.

In California where one openly sees fascism everywhere, dressed as Minutemen, John Birch Society, American Nazi Party, Ronald Reagan, Richard Nixon, and fascist police and prison guards, all which must be dealt with. While here in the east, we tend to be lulled to sleep because these same forces hide themselves as liberals, Jewish Defense League, or are undercover agents.

These are some of the reasons why we must support the BPP and learn from their experiences and faults so we can all get together down the road. They need our support on all levels, especially money. They need our financial support to continue the publication of the Black Panther Newspaper and the Intercommunal Youth Institute.

Yes, my trip was informational, successful, and rewarding. Because of it, our two organizations have moved closer together. We can learn much about community work and we can teach them of the struggles of workers.

To paraphrase the song, 'He ain't heavy, he's my Brother.' From my visit with BPP, I came away feeling, 'They ain't Heavy, They are my Brothers and Sisters.' I will return, what about you ?

Wilbur Haddock  
UBW



**ERICKA HUGGINS,**



## **DON'T STARVE - FIGHT!**

WORKERS during the last Depression transformed their despair over mounting evictions and layoffs into collective action for the right to live a decent life. For the millions of jobless, the National Unemployed Council was the key organization through which they fought.

Organized in 1930, the National Unemployed Council had councils and branches in nearly every city and town in the nation, and a membership of 800,000 by 1936. Throughout America the councils fought, often ferociously, for the rights of unemployed and employed workers alike, appearing frequently on the picket lines to help win strikes. There was virtually no scabbing during the Depression.

The Council was a direct response to nationwide hunger and lack of relief. The unemployed who, in the earliest days of the Depression, had retreated in private shame, increasingly relied on collective action to insure their survival. In cities across the nation, they organized mass actions to demand food, public works, and unemployment insurance. Under the banner of "Don't Starve--Fight!", they demonstrated, marched and battled police in New York, Chicago, St. Louis, Detroit...

During this period, millions of families were evicted from their homes because they were unable to pay the rent or meet the mortgage. Some of these people had worked all their lives for their homes, yet blamed themselves when, without work, they were unable to make the payments. Imagine how they felt when the deputies, the agents of the landowners, came and moved their furniture and belongings out into the street! In the midst of these personal crises, the unemployed councils would appear in number, moving the furniture back into the house, and guarding it against the deputies. This incident

was repeated countless times across the nation, from the farms of Iowa to the ghettos of the Bronx. In this way, the councils were able to win the support of thousands, some of whom had previously written them off as communists. In some cities, like Chicago, the councils forced the authorities to stop evictions entirely.

BLACKS, then as now the hardest hit by unemployment, played a central role in the Council, which took a militant stand against racism. The Council used publicity and direct pressure to fight discrimination against Blacks and foreign-born people in the dispensing of relief.

In many places, unemployed people tried to organize economic self-help. In Seattle, the Unemployed Citizen's League fished, picked unmarketable fruits and vegetables, and cut wood, exchanging it directly with carpenters, doctors, and seamstresses.

Throughout, the Unemployed Council was attacked as Communist. In dozens of cities, the jobless were slandered by businessmen, investigated by committees, clubbed and jailed by police as Reds. Socialists, Communists and other leftists backed the Unemployed Council and were active in it, but the membership of the councils consistently rejected witch hunts or expulsions as politically divisive.

The popular thrust of the unemployed councils declined with the advent of reforms of the New Deal, but was maintained in part in the organization of the Congress of Industrial Organizations, the CIO. In their refusal to be red-baited, in their stance against racism, in their unity with employed workers on picket lines, and in their determined support of each other in demanding the means for survival, the Unemployed Councils demonstrated remarkable and historical solidarity.

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MAY 30, 1937--Chicago, Ill: Memorial Day Massacre. Striking steel workers, demanding union recognition are attacked by 500 police as they peacefully picket the Republic Steel plant. 10 murdered and scores wounded.

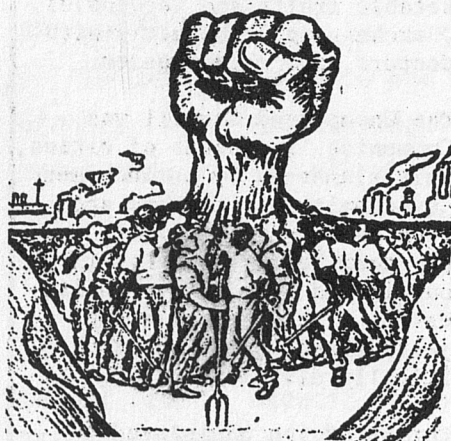
Meeting new comrades, exchanging information and experiences and developing new allies is con-

sistent with U.B.W.'s practice.

Our trip to the west coast gave us renewed confidence in the future. With a continued commitment and collective, practical work. . . We Shall Win Without A Doubt.

Central Staff  
united black workers

# APRIL 26 - MAY 1 MARCH FOR JOBS!



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"If you think by hanging us you can stamp out the labor movement... the movement from which the down-trodden millions, the millions who toil in want and misery, expect salvation, if this is your opinion, then hang us!

"Here you will tread upon a spark, but there and there, behind you and in front of you, and every-where, flames will blaze up. It is a subterranean fire. You cannot put it out."

-- August Spies, before being sentenced to death in the eight-hour-day frame-up in Chicago, 1886.

## LOCAL 906: **cont.**

saying "what is the job of the officials of local 906?" U.B.W. says the workers' problems; our problems is their job. If they can't handle it, lets do something about it. We put them in office and we can take them out. And that we must do!

U.B.W. is calling for effective leadership and sound programs. We call for the formation of Unemployment Committees to provide assistance to employed and layed off workers. Call for a massive Worker's March for Jobs on May 1, International Worker's Day. Call for an immediate end to deportation of fellow workers. Call for unity of our combined struggles. Call for jobs not war. Call for Support of International Workers Struggles. Call for a Revolution within Local 906 U.A.W.

united black workers

### U.B.W. Crisis Demands

1. Formation of Unemployment Committee
2. Full seniority rights for all laid off workers.
3. Shorter work week--no reduction in pay.
4. No forced overtime while workers are laid off, and stop Speed-Up.
5. Full S.U.B. pay for *everyone* for the duration of lay-offs to be paid by the Company.
6. Increase unemployment benefits for *all* laid off workers.
7. Expand food stamp program for unemployed.
8. Moratorium on all debts against eviction and repossessions during periods of lay-offs.
9. Stop discriminatory layoffs of Black, Latin and Women workers.
10. No.Arbitrary Layoffs



# MOU: THE STRUGGLE FOR LABOR UNITY

On March 15, 1975 *El Mundo*, one of the daily newspapers in Puerto Rico, devoted an entire editorial to a plea to union members to take an interest in "the future of their unions and the preservation of their jobs by mobilizing against those who are attempting to steer the unions in the sole direction of socialism and independence."

This editorial is only one example of the all-out attack against progressive trade unions, including the MOU (United Workers Movement) leadership, which has been taking place in the last few months.

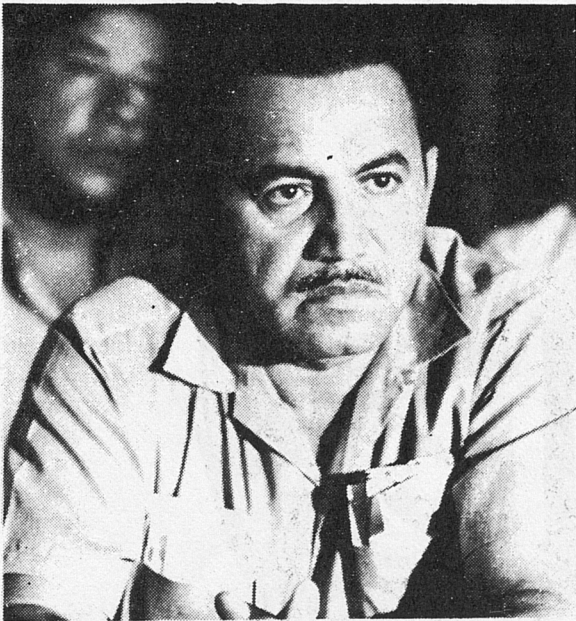
This attack has taken the form of full-page newspaper ads, news articles, and denunciations by government officials. The particular focus has been redbaiting against communists within trade unions; and of course the MOU, whose coordinator, Pedro Grant, is also a member of the Central Committee of the Puerto Rican Socialist Party, has come under heavy fire.

One can easily understand why the colonial government of Puerto Rico is threatened by the MOU. At a time when Puerto Rico is suffering a major economic crisis, the MOU is building a united trade union movement capable of and active in coordinating island-wide strike support. The MOU was formed on October 16, 1972 out of a labor committee organized by a group of labor leaders which sought a vehicle for unity in the trade union movement.

The MOU has forty member unions and about 100 locals among which are the Boilermakers Union, the Island Union of Electrical Construction and Industrial Workers (UITICE), the Union of Workers of the Cement Industry, the Amalgamated Meat Cutters Union, the National Workers Union, the Puerto Rican Industrial Maintenance and Service Union, the Ready Mix Workers Union, the Union of Petrochemical Workers, the Union of Housing Fund Employees, the Union of Fomento Company Employees, the Union of United Firefighters, the Union of Professional Employees of the Electrical Authority (AFF), Puerto Rican Workers Guild, the Independent Union of the Liquor Industry of Arcibo, the Congress of Industrial Unions and APATE.

The following are excerpts from a conversation held in June of 1974 by *Puerto Rico Libre!* with Pablo Rivera, Secretary for Education and Propaganda of the MOU.

Pedro Grant, President of the MOU.



Puerto Rican Solidarity Committee, P.O. Box 319, Cooper Station, N.Y., N.Y. 10003

## Some Background

... In Puerto Rico there have been many, many efforts to unify the labor movement. These efforts date back to the beginnings of this century. In that epoch, it was the *Federacion Libre* which gave most of the impulse to this unity. But the *Federacion Libre* ... became a very, very bureaucratized organization. In its close relationship with the Socialist Party of that time, it was becoming more an anti-worker instrument than a pro-worker one, to the point that in 1936, in the great sugarcane strike, it betrayed the cane workers — turned its back on them ... then the workers in the canefields decided to break with the *Federacion Libre*.

... The next great effort to unite the working class ... was the confederation — the CGT — the *Confederacion General de Trabajadores* — 1941, 1942. ... Within a few years they managed to unite more than 300 unions, comprising thousands of workers, thousands; and the incredible thing is that in a few years it had the most dramatic growth of any labor effort our country had ever seen. ... Its leadership was very committed and very genuine, and truly represented the workers. ... So now the CGT, being such a power, was an obstacle to the plans which the gentlemen who own this country had. So they put into their heads the idea of destroying the CGT. They managed to get cadres of their party, the *Partido Popular Democratico*, the PPD, into places as union leaders. ... At the same time they began to name leaders of the CGT to public posts, government positions, and they managed to split the CGT. And by splitting it, naturally, they managed to kill it ... to tie up the labor movement in this country for many years.

Of course, there were always attempts to achieve that unity, and in 1969 the *Movimiento de Accion Sindical*, the MAS, was organized. But this was not truly a workers' movement; it was a movement of union leaders ... participation of the base was not really heard much. They also committed a series of political errors, the MAS, so they destroyed themselves within two years. The MAS never developed to the point where it was enough of a threat to the government of this country. ... When it died it was still in diapers. ... The death of the MAS was an infant mortality.

Then the efforts continued. With *compañero* Pedro Grant at its head. ... in 1972 many union representatives got together to discuss on what basis labor unity in this country could stand. ... At that moment they agreed on a loose association, timid lukewarm. ... But this is the Puerto Rican reality, and this was the basis on which we began to work. There wasn't a strong desire for unity, except for a few of the labor leaders — very few. Among them we should give special mention to *compañero* Pedro Grant, 25 years as a union leader in this country.

## The MOU is Founded

... Pedro Grant begins to organize the MOU and the MOU begins to organize with independent unions and with international unions; with both. It begins to work. ... The MOU is a very broad movement ... which embraces every kind of serious labor organization. There's room for all kinds in the MOU. It is not an independence group. It is not a statehood group. It is not a people's organization. It is a labor organization; and it is for labor. It is on this basis in 1972 that the MOU was created.

It has had its ups and downs, but it has always been growing, always growing. ... It has had its internal troubles. Recently ... Mr. Guillermo Bobones ... the executive secretary of the MOU ... resigned.

... Bobones held that the labor movement ... should not



# International Worker's Day

In the United States, we've celebrated September 1 as "Labor Day" in recent times. On that day, the boss gives you a few hours off to go have a picnic, drink a few beers, and try to forget what rotten jobs and difficult lives you and everyone else you know have.

But May 1 has been celebrated as International Workers Day by working people throughout the world since 1890, and that was the original "Labor Day" in this country as well.

## ORIGINS OF MAY DAY

May Day grew out of U.S. workers' struggles for the eight-hour day. As early as 1866, the National Labor Union, a coalition of trade unions and labor reform groups, set the struggle for the eight-hour day as its number one priority. (New Yorkers can be proud of the fact that the bricklayers' union here was one of the first groups to go on strike for this demand.)

At that time, the norm in most industry here was the ten-hour day and the six-day week. In the garment and textile industries, the work day was often as much as sixteen hours. Employers bitterly fought against the eight-hour day movement, and in some industries, such as steel, the working day was growing longer.

By 1885, the idea of a general strike around the issue of the eight-hour day had captured the imagination of tens of thousands of workers—despite the fact

that most labor "leaders" were unwilling to take such a militant stand. Early in 1886, local workers' assemblies throughout the country set May 1 of that year as the date of the general strike.

The centers of the eight-hour day movement were the major industrial cities of the time—New York, Chicago, Cincinnati, Baltimore, and Milwaukee. Strikes and demonstrations building for the May 1 general strike involved over a quarter of a million workers. By May 1, around 300,000 workers had already won the eight-hour day.

## THE HAYMARKET MASSACRE

The heart of the movement was Chicago. During April, there were huge demonstrations building for the May 1 strike that drew more than 25,000 people each.

At the same time, the National Guard was enlarged, the police prepared to "put down trouble," and leading businessmen armed their employees. According to one history of the period, one large company formed "an organization of 150 young men . . . armed with breech-loading Remington rifles," which pursued "a regular course of drilling." On the eve of the strike, the Commercial Club put up \$2000 to buy machine guns for the First Infantry of the Illinois National Guard.

On May 1, 30,000 Chicago workers struck, including lumbermen, freight handlers, woodworkers and railroad workers, and about 60,000 either watched or participated in their demonstrations. On May 3, as more and more workers were coming out on strike, police fired into a crowd that was trying to keep

scabs from entering the McCormick Harvester Works, leaving four dead and many wounded. The next day, there were street battles between police and strikers, and at night several rallies were organized to protest police brutality.

One of these took place at Haymarket Square on the evening of May 4. Toward the end of the peaceful rally, after many people had already left, 180 police marched in to disperse the meeting. Suddenly a bomb exploded in the crowd, killing one policeman and wounding many.

This bombing, thought by many to have been done by agents-provocateur, unleashed the full fury of the government, press, police and church against labor leaders. Police smashed the presses that printed their newspapers, raided homes, and arrested many, especially the foreign-born. Many people were beaten and tortured, and some were bribed to act as state witnesses.

In the weeks that followed, similar repressive tactics were followed in other cities. In Milwaukee, for example, the entire district executive board of the Knights of Labor was arrested and charged with "rioting and conspiracy." Others were arrested in Pittsburgh and New York.

In Chicago, eight union leaders were indicted for the murder of the policeman who died in the Haymarket bombing, including August Spies and Albert Parsons, eloquent spokesmen for the eight-hour day movement. Although only two had been in the vicinity at the time of the bombing, seven were sentenced and four were hanged.

The immediate result of the mass May Day strikes was severe repression of all the existing labor organizations. Thousands of workers lost their jobs and were blacklisted, and the "yellow-dog contract," requiring workers to swear that they would not join a labor organization (still used today in non-union coal mines, for example), was widely used.

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